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Sailor Boy's Experience

ABOARD A SLAVE SHIP

by Samuel Robinson

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Samuel Robinson

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A SAILOR BOY'S EXPERIENCE

ABOARD A

SLAVE SHIP

IN THE

BEGINNING OF THE PRESENT CENTURY.

BY

SAMUEL ROBINSON

HAMILTON:

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MDCCCLXVII

“Tost on the tide, she feels the tempest blow,
And dreads the vengeance of so fell a foe;
As the proud horse, with costly trappings gay,
Exulting, prances to the bloody fray;
Spurning the ground, he glories in his might,
But reels tumultuous in the shock of fight;
Even so, caparisoned in gaudy pride
The bounding vessel dances on the tide.”

– *Falconer.*

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INTRODUCTION

This little volume contains the record of the principal occurrences witnessed by me during two voyages in the African Slave Trade, in the course of the first four years of the present century. The facts recorded, – which were in substance communicated at the time in letters to friends at home, – were fully extended in my journals, and are here given at length – the epistolary style being retained.

In giving publicity to these facts, I have deferred in some measure to the expressed desire of many friends, to whom the manuscript has been submitted, or the principal incidents contained therein detailed – though I fear that, as is often the case, friendship has led to a partial, and too favourable opinion. I must, however, in all candour, say that the chief motive by which I have been actuated in the course I have thus taken arises from the fact that throughout the many years that have passed since the incidents recorded in the letters took place, I have heard so many gross mis-statements respecting West Indian slavery, and the horrors of the “Middle Passage,” that I formed the resolution, should time be allowed me, to give the result of my own experience with as much candour and as little prejudice as I could, in order to disabuse the minds of well-meaning people, who may have seen only one side of this question. This leisure, in the evening of a long, laborious, and uneventful life, it has pleased the wise Disposer of all events to allow me; and the recalling to my mind, and the recording on paper, of some of the joys and sorrows of my early days, has relieved the tedium of many an hour of my leisure time; and I hope the simple tale of truth will have a similar effect on an indulgent reader. Besides,

I am inclined to think that some facts recorded in the following pages may be new to many readers. Young folks will perhaps find something that may prove instructive, and worth their notice – especially in connection with natural history, – besides much that may tend to their amusement: while I trust that nothing will be discovered hurtful to the feelings of anyone.

It may give a little interest to the narrative to state, if it be true, as I believe it is, that I am the only man alive who served an apprenticeship to the slave trade. I entered that service in the spring of 1800, and was compelled to abandon it in consequence of an accident, the particulars of which are told in the letters, in the summer of 1804; while in accordance with the united voice of a generous and philanthropic people, the Emancipation Bill became law immediately thereafter.

It is doubtless the opinion of many that I put myself into a wrong position, and incurred blame and obloquy by entering into this obnoxious trade at all. It may be so; I will not dispute the matter. I certainly did not feel myself comfortable or at home in the service. But let it be remembered in my favour that the trade was then a lawful one; whilst, at the same time, I was induced to enter it by what is called an accidental circumstance, which the narrative will explain; and an irresistible desire for a seafaring life so completely carried me away, that it became a matter of perfect indifference to me where the ship went, if not to the bottom, provided I was aboard of her – or in what trade engaged, if not a pirate.

It is perhaps expected that I should tender apology for the style of language used throughout the letters. No one can be more sensible than I am of much shortcoming in this respect. I have not aimed – for the very sufficient reason that I felt it utterly beyond my reach – at elegance or sublimity of expression. I might have made such an attempt had I been as well acquainted with the rules of English Literature, and the use of the pen, as

I was at one time with tar and ropes, and in later days with the hammer and the trowel. My chief aim in this matter has been clearness and simplicity. And I entertain the hope that the plain, unvarnished record of simple facts, so far as observed by me, will be intelligible and somewhat interesting to my readers, to whose kind and generous indulgence I commit my little book.

S.R.

Pine Cottage, Abbeygreen,
Lesmahagow, *Sept.*, 1867.

A Sailor Boy's Experience

ABOARD A SLAVE SHIP

LETTER I

Liverpool, *March*, 1800.

My Dear Schoolfellow, – I know very well you will feel anxious to hear from me, to learn what I think of the life of a sailor, about which I have talked so much for some time. For this purpose, it is my intention to communicate my experience in a series of letters from the different ports at which I may arrive. I need make no apology to you for the style and manner in which the facts may be conveyed; one thing you may depend upon, I will tell you nothing that my own experience has not proved to be a literal fact.

I sailed from Garliestown in the old *Jean of Wigton*, Captain Eglin, as you are already aware, to join my ship in Liverpool. It was all very well with me while the old craft was sailing out of the bay, with the water as smooth as a milk-basin, and for a few miles along the lovely coast as far as the Isle of Whithorn, when a sad change came over the spirit of my dream. I well recollect being very sick from measles – I well recollect being very tired, sometimes hungry, while driving a pair of horses when only nine years of age – I will recollect an afternoon's agony which you and I suffered in playing truant, when we ought to have been in the old smoky school of Barglass, and many other uncomfortable circumstances in which I have been placed; but all these unpleasant things together, they come

far short of the deplorable state of helplessness I felt coming over me when the old sloop began to tumble about in the flood tide which rushes round the Mull of Galloway – the most southerly point of Scotland – and on its way to fill up the bays of Luce and Wigton and the Solway Firth, up which it rushes with the speed of a race-horse, and by which so many hapless persons are swept away while crossing Bo'ness Sands. By this commotion, I was thrown into a state of utter prostration; and if ever a poor sinner was turned inside out I was that person. We sailed from Garliestown at twelve noon, and had all things gone well with us, we ought to have reached Liverpool at that hour next day. In the course of the night, however, the wind checked round to the southward and blew a whole gale right in our teeth; and toward morning I found, to my great relief, that the old craft had got her legs again and was quite steady, and when daylight came I crawled on deck, and was happy to see we were snug in the harbour of Ramsay, Isle of Man. The gale had abated with the ebb-tide, a lovely morning was shining, and at high water we got under weigh again and stood away for Liverpool. As soon as we left the harbour, my sickness returned in all its bitterness. We got on pretty well during the day, but after dark another gale drove us back, and we were obliged to run for the Isle of Man once more, and found shelter in Douglas Harbour.

Mona, or Man, is a pretty little island, about equal distance from England, Scotland, and Ireland, twenty-two miles long by twelve broad, exactly the size of Loch Neagh, in Ireland. We are told that the capes of the island agree to a wonderful nearness with the bays of the Loch; and an Irishman will assert with much gravity that the island, by some unexplained process, came out of the loch, and settled down where we now find it. As a clinching proof of the fact, he tells us – what is quite true – that there are neither moles, toads, nor serpents in either of the islands, they having all been banished by St Patrick, and that the rocks and minerals are identical – consequently, he argues,

Mona must be fugitive from the Emerald Isle. Manxmen, like all other Celts – of whom sections are also found in the north of Scotland, west of Ireland, and Wales, and whose languages are all dialects of the ancient Gaul – are very superstitious. One instance may be given. On a certain night, all the fishermen of the place disperse themselves over the country to hunt the wren. Provided with sticks and lanterns, they sally forth in full cry to rouse the pretty little bird, dashing into furze and thorn bushes till their hands and faces are often streaming with blood. When one is caught, they pluck of a lot of feathers and toss them up in the wind, and according as they fall or are carried away by a good current of air the good or ill success of the herring-fishing season is prognosticated.

The gale having again taken off, we started once more, and the next morning, after another night of great suffering, when the old hooker got steady, I again ventured to look up, when I found we had entered the river Mersey; and there lay the far-famed town of Liverpool, covering for miles the rising ground on the east bank of the river and Cheshire on the west. The river here is full of ships' masts towering from the docks and from vessels anchored in the stream, quite astonished me. A heavy fall of snow had taken place during the night, which gave the town a somewhat odd appearance. We got into the dock in the afternoon, and my uncle took me to his lodgings and treated me very kindly. His ship, the *Lady Neilson*, is being fitted out, and as I have entered her you will again hear from me. – I am,
yours very truly, S.R.



LETTER II

Liverpool, *April* 1800.

Dear William, – Perhaps the fact that we have been so intimately acquainted ever since our infancy may be accounted for by the similarity of our tastes and dispositions – especially our extreme bashfulness, which I might call our besetting sin. Such a disposition might be all very well during our school-days, and among our friends and comrades, as it has made us universally respected by old and young, but it will never do here. I have entered my ship and commenced my new avocation, and have got myself laughed at – more than once and even insulted on account of my propensity. But you know well, that however unwilling to insult others, neither of us, was silly enough to allow others to insult us, with impunity. I have begun to act on that principle here, and I find it will answer the end. You know I am thirteen years old, and stout for my years; and some of the would-be heroes, who made rather free with me, have found out that it is not at all a pleasant business.

You remember that my fancy for a sea life was excited by the long yarns which James Cooper used to spin to us after being a voyage to the West Indies, aided no doubt by the knowledge that my mother's brother was Captain of a merchant ship, and her cousin one of the principal ship-owners in Liverpool. You are also aware that I obtained a reluctant consent from my dear parents, without which I would not have gone to sea. I find I am as yet very awkward in my new profession – bedaubing my clothes with paint, pitch, &c., and often in somebody's way. Indeed there are not many of us yet – only the second mate, some painters and riggers fitting up the rigging, as the crew will not

be shipped till we are ready for sea; and, as I show willingness, they are all friendly with me. It is customary for every vessel in harbour to exhibit the colours on Sunday at the gaff and royal mast head, to show to what nation they belong. I being only the apprentice, it was my business to hoist the flag. On the top of every royal mast – say 120 feet high – there is a broad piece of wood, called a truck, nailed down, with a small sheave in it, through which a line or halyard is reeved for the purpose of hoisting the flag. No one being on board to direct me, I made a great blunder. There is a piece of rope sewed along one end of the flag, with a loop at each end for fixing the halyards to. One end of the halyards I ought to have fixed to the upper edge of the flag to haul it up, and the other to the lower edge to haul it down. Unfortunately I neglected to fix the down haul and ran up the flag to its full height, considering I had done the thing admirably. Guess my dismay when, on returning in the evening to haul the flag down, I found I must climb to the mast head and bring it down. I never had been at the mast head; but there was no alternative. To say, when asked on Monday, why I had not hauled it down, that I was afraid to go up, would never do, and to own my blunder was unpleasant, so I screwed up my courage and brought it down – a job of which I felt somewhat proud.

We have got the ship into a sea-worthy state at last – painted and polished like a Dutch doll, a row of the black muzzles of eleven cannon, nine-pounders, peeping out of each side, five large sash windows in the stern to light the cabin, and underneath painted, in large letters, “Lady Neilson, of Liverpool, allowed to carry 294 slaves.” The cargo is of a very heterogeneous character, consisting of salt, muskets, powder and shot, rum and British brandy, lead bars, hatchets and other hardware, light cotton cloth, tobacco, beads trinkets &c., &c., all of the cheapest and most worthless description. You must understand that, as there is no money circulating in Africa, all

business is transacted by way of exchanging one commodity for another. Our business being to purchase slaves, ivory, and gold dust, and the natives having those things to dispose of. both parties are accommodated. We are now at anchor in the river. We have a crew of thirty-five, including everybody aboard – captain, three mates, doctor, carpenter, boatswain, gunner, and steward. In consequence of the hot press for the navy, it is impossible to get a crew of efficient seamen in the merchant service. Ours are a “motley squad” – the captain, second and third mate, and three apprentices are Scotch, two Yankies, one Creole, three Italians, one Welsh, one Swede, two landsmen, and the remainder English and Irish. Strange to say, one of my neighbour apprentices is from Wigton; his name is Thomas Hannah. We have often seen him passing on a roan horse, carrying messages to old Jeffrey of Knockincurr; the other, John Clerk, from Castle Douglas; they are eighteen years of age, and this is their second voyage. We sail to-morrow, so that my next – if I live to reach it – will be from Africa, some four thousand miles away. – Ever yours, S.R.



LETTER III

Acra, *September*, 1800

We sailed a few days after the despatch of my last Letter, and about sunset that evening all hands mustered on the quarter-deck, to be formed into *watches*, which is done in this way:- the seamen are all place in line, when the captain and chief mate make choice of one alternately, so that they are divided into two equal numbers. The party chosen by the captain are called *starboard* watch – *starboard* denoting the *right* hand side of the ship, when one is standing looking to the bow; while those whom the mate chooses are called the *larboard*, or port watch, having charge of the left hand side. These watches ought to be on deck and below alternately every four hours, night and day – it is so in the navy, but as merchant ships are often short-handed, all hands have to be on deck from eight in the morning till six in the evening, when the night watch is set. Suppose the starboard watch to go on at six in the evening, they remain till eight, – this is called the *dog* watch, owing to its shortness, – when they go below, and the other watch is called, who stand till twelve; the starboard again till four, the other again till eight, – or, much oftener, all hands are called at six, – so that, from six to seven hours in the twenty-four is all the time one can call his own. But even this scanty portion is often miserably curtailed. In the event of a change of weather, when sail may have to be shortened some of the poor fellows may not have many minutes in their hammocks. The boat-swain has a silver whistle by which calling watches, and all other movements are regulated, similar to the bugle in a cavalry troop. The sound of this whistle, accompanied by the “All hands ahoy,” brings them

tumbling up the hatchway, often with nothing on but shirt and trousers. The time is regulated in this way:— every seaman must take what is called “his *trick* at the wheel,” that is, he must steer the ship for two hours in regular succession. There is a recess in the companion, or cabin hatchway porch, here the compass is placed, beside which a half-hour sand glass is kept constantly running. There is a large bell hung beside the foremast for the purpose of sounding the time, day and night. Suppose the man at the wheel comes to his trick at eight o’clock, he finds the sand glass newly turned and running down, and takes very good care that it should not stand idle, as be neglecting to turn it when run down, he lengthens his trick. He watches it, therefore with, with great care, and the moment it is run he turns it, and shouts at the top of his voice, “Strike the bell one;” when run again, “Strike the bell two,” the “three,” then “four,” making two hours, when he is relieved from the helm; and his successor, following out this principle, at the end of two hours the bell strikes eight, or four hours, and the watch is changed. This process goes on day and night, and regulates all the working order of the ship.

There is another very necessary arrangement — the dividing of the crew into *messes*. The captain, doctor, and mates live in the cabin, attended by the steward and a cabin boy, and when the ship’s stores are made up, all the best pieces of beef are selected, barrellled up and marked “prime,” for their use; indeed all the cabin stores are of prime quality and unlimited quantity. The crew are divided into messes of six each, and each mess appoints one of their number to look after the weighing out of their provisions by the steward, and handing them to the cook. The beef for every mess is weighed, all in one lot, and put into the boiler in a bag net, so every mess knows its own; the pea soup and *borgue*, or porridge, all boiled and divided. Our allowance was six pounds of biscuit a week for each man, all weighed out every Monday morning; on Sunday and Thursday one pound of

beef, one pound of flour, and two ounces of suet; on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, one pound and a half of pork, and one pint of split peas; and on Tuesday and Saturday – called by the sailors banyan or hungered days – we got one half pound of oatmeal, one gill of molasses, two ounces of butter, and four ounces of cheese; with two gills of rum, or four of wine, each day. This was quite a sufficient quantity for any one, had the quality been good and the supply kept up, but long before we arrived here one thing after another spoiled, or ran out, till six pounds of bread in the week, and one pound of beef in the day was all we got. The beef was given out at eight o'clock in the morning: we dined at noon and supped then we found time and anything to eat. It soon came that no beef was left over night, and no time to boil it for breakfast, so that we got into the custom of cutting off each a thin slice, with a biscuit for breakfast – spitting out the tough pieces – and boiling the remainder, which, at twelve o'clock, was divided into six shares, when one of the mess would be blindfolded, or turn his back to the table, and another would point to one of the shares, and ask “Who shall have this?” when the blind man would name one of the party, then another, till every one has his share, which must serve him until next morning. The biscuit, too, got mouldy from the damp, and full of little brown insects who drilled it in all directions, so that by the end of the week, a large quantity of dust and *weevels* was all that was left in the bread bag.

We had no sooner got into blue water again than my old enemy returned in force. I was in a very different position now, however, than when rolling about in the dirty cabin of the old Jean of Wigton – but sea-sickness, like toothache, gets no sympathizers, and though I suffered dreadfully I had to show face. Two other ships started with us, also bound for Africa – the Pemona and Lady Herriot – and on getting into the Channel we were fortunate enough to catch a strong steady breeze, as fair

as it could blow, which soon carried us clear of the land, and through the Bay of Biscay, in good style. We had run on in this way for several days, under as much sail as we could possibly carry, and as the whole weight of the Atlantic Ocean sets in along the French coast, with a stiff breeze from the N.N.W., as was the case with us, a tremendous long heavy sea was running; the ship rolling heavily – everything aloft straining to its utmost tension – when a most melancholy misfortune befell us.

I had been crawling about all the morning, and not yet having got my *sea feet*, nor for much use. The captain, getting sight of me, sang out “Hallo, you Sam, get up on the maintop gallant yard, keep a sharp look out, and sing out when you see a strange sail.” I got on to the yard and sat down with an arm round the royal mast to keep my seat. And when I found myself swinging sixty or seventy feet one way by the roll of the ship, and again as far in an opposite direction, while the mast and rigging absolutely whistled from the force of the motion, I certainly thought myself from home. But there I was and I must make the best of it. I kept my seat for about three hours; and though I ought not to have done so till called for, when the bell struck eight for dinner, I made the best of my way down, when, just as I dropped to the deck, the captain hailed me. “Where are you going now?” “For dinner, sir,” I answered. “O,” said he, “if you can take dinner there must be no more sea-sickness.” Eating, however, was no part of my intention, and I went forward and lay down below the windlass till the men would eat their dinner. This was all very well. I had got a bit of drill, and there was no harm done; but one of these noble fellows who, in full health and high spirits, was dining with his comrades, was eating his last meal. Before another hour passed away his soul would be in the world of spirits, and his body in the mighty deep. As soon as two bells struck, our old friend Thomas Hannah and a Welsh lad named Barns were ordered up to scrape and grease

down the main-top mast, a portion of the same mast that I had just come down from, but considerably lower down than my old berth. It was necessary for them to fix a triangle of spars to sit upon, and lower down with them during the progress of the work. And they had not been seated many minutes till a tremendous crash and a scream of agony were heard, and on looking up there were broken spars, yards, sails, and rigging hanging in one confused mass. The screech came from poor Hannah, whom I saw, about thirty yards from the ship, struggling in the foaming sea. The poor fellow had been jerked away like a stone out of a sling. The captain snatched up an oar and pitched it as near the drowning boy as he could, and shouted, "Keep good heart, we'll send a boat directly." No doubt he was a swimmer, as all Wigton boys are; but the dreadful pitch and fall would, most likely, paralyse him so much as to render him powerless. But, be that as it may, we never saw him more. The ship was going like a race-horse — a high sea running — and before she could be thrown up in the wind, and the way taken of her, to allow a boat to be lowered, poor Tom was far, far away. "The cry did knock against my very heart — poor soul, he perished." A boat was lowered as soon as possible and went in search, but without success. His body had become food for the inhabitants of the mighty deep, and his soul had gone to his great account. Barns was more fortunate. In the fall, he got entangled in the rigging, fell on the main yard arm, and was saved. The top mast had broken below the place where they were seated, and they were involved in the ruin. I believe you will agree with me in considering my narrow escape as no accidental affair; but look on it as I did, and shall continue to do to the end of my life, as a direct interposition of Divine Providence in my preservation; as had I remained aloft a short time longer, or been again ordered up after dinner, as I well expected, I would most probably have been a thing of the past.

The other ships bore down and kindly offered assistance. All hands went to work, and next morning found us all right, and careering over the blue water as if nothing had happened. In due time the breeze softened down, the weather became perceptibly warmer, my sea-sickness wore off, I got *sea feet*, became quite cheerful, and entered with spirit into my necessary drill – learning to read the compass, the names and uses of the ropes, the difference of the *standing* and *running* rigging, and other things necessary to be known.

A rather exciting affair turned up one morning about sunrise by the sight of three ships about our own size a few miles off, on our weather bow. The Atlantic swarming at this time with French privateers, this was not a very desirable sight. We carried twenty-two guns, the *Pemona* the same, and the *Lady Herriot*, being a smaller ship, eighteen. All hands were called to quarters, the ports opened, guns run out and breeched, bulk heads knocked down, match-tubs placed, shot handed along, the other boy and I, whose duty it was to hand along the powder cartridges from the magazine, at our post – while all this time the ships were got into line of battle, and gradually closing with what might prove an enemy. When within a short distance of closing, one of the strangers fired a gun and hoisted English colours, when we also showed our colours. They turned out to be Liverpool West Indiamen, who had sailed about the same time as ourselves. I have heard of people who felt quite annoyed in a case of this kind that there was no fighting. I honestly confess I felt no such annoyance. I was quite glad to find they were not Frenchmen. Had an engagement taken place I daresay I might have done my duty; but I was very well pleased that I was not put to the proof. As our West India friends stood way southwest and our squadron to the south, we soon parted company.

In a few days after we made the island of Teneriffe, one of the Canary Islands. It is a small one, but rises to the height

of fifteen thousand feet. There were patches of cloud hanging on the side at different elevations, which gave it quite a singular aspect. At a considerable height above the sea, a mass of lightish coloured cloud went round it like a sash, hiding the mountain, after which appeared a large space of hundreds of feet of black rock, then another belt of cloud, and another peep of the body of the monster; but unfortunately the apex was shrouded in white mist, concealing all the upper part, which did away with much of the magnificent effect of its usual appearance. Turn your eye across the Bay of Wigton to the great Cairnsmore of Cree – as you and I have done so often, and imagine you see piled one above another *four* mountains, each as high as the present one on the top of it, terminating in a regular cone, and you have something like a Teneriffe.

Shortly after passing the island, a very scurvy trick was played off on my friend Jem, the other boy, and me. He was a stout, hardy boy, a little older than I, but not so tall. We always had, all along, lived on the best of terms, never having any dispute. The officers, however, took a notion to get up a fight between us for their own amusement, and began by whispering to me that Jem was bouncing that he could thrash me, and played the same game with him. However, we understood them, and payed no attention to their story, but remained good friends. It is the custom every evening to wash the decks, by throwing buckets of water over them and scouring them with freestone, and scrubbing them with brushes. During this operation we wore nothing but a pair of trousers. After finishing the operation one evening, not suspecting anything of the unmanly plot, we were putting on our shirts as usual, when the Captain ordered the steward to “bring up the cat.” This instrument of torture is composed of nine pieces of whipcord, about eighteen inches long each, with nine knots on each strand. The handle is a piece of thick rope about the same length – a much more serious affair

than the *taws* of our good old teacher at Barglass. The whole of the crew were present, and were about going to supper, when their attention was arrested by a shout from the Captain – “You, Sam, tie up Jem and give him a dozen.” Nothing for it but obedience, I got a piece of rope-yarn, and poor Jem having stretched his arms as wide and hands as high as he could reach, I fastened each thumb to the mizzen-shrouds, and the cat was handed to me with the comforting intelligence – “Now, if you do not lay it into him I’ll be *** if I don’t flog you.” In obedience to this kind-hearted Christian order, I went to work as tenderly as I could; but that would not do, and by and bye I saw red and blue spots on poor Jem’s white skin, which hurt me nearly as much as it did him. When I had given him twelve lashes, I was ordered to “cut him down,” that is, to loose him from the rigging. No sooner was this done than “Tie up Sam,” was the order, which was done, and I also got twelve lashes, and was cut down, thinking the game was played out. Not so by any means. “Tie up Jem,” which was done, and he got another dozen. “Tie up Sam,” again shouted my kind hearted uncle, the skipper, which was about to be done, when the steward, who had heard the plot, came round and whispered to me – “Don’t let yourself be tied up, they want you to fight.” My back was quite hot enough already, so when Jamie came with his yarn to seize me up, I shoved him back. “Tie him up, or I’ll tie up you,” roared the Captain. The boy, not having got the hint which the steward had given me, still persisted, till I struck him. My change was returned by a smack on the right eye – he was left-handed – till I thought I saw all the stars in the milky-way. The steward, a kind-hearted, declared he would attend by me; and the gunner, a Yankee, did the needful for Jem. We hammered away for some time without doing much mischief, pretty well out of puff and the deck wet and slippery, had fallen. We were lifted and allowed to take a breath a bit. While doing so, someone shouted,

“He’ll beat you, Sam,” for my consolation, when I elicited a hearty shout of laughter by replying, “If he do, I’ll never p.....h in Scotland,” not thinking I was four thousand miles away from you, and the spot behind the plantation beside the old school, where all our disputes were settled. We had another long set-to, when I was working him back, and he would have fallen had not the gunner propped him with his knee. This was more than Paddy would stand, and the officers had as much trouble to prevent a battle as they had to bring one on. However, by this time, Jem said he would give in, and, with the loss of a little blood and a black eye a piece, there was not much harm done. We got a glass of brandy each, and were ordered not to be called to our night watch. I went to the doctor for something to take the blackness off my face, but he ordered me off, with the flattering assurance that it was an honour to me.

Another very unpleasant affair took place a few days after, of a similar description. It was not to be expected that our two landsmen – a weaver and a shoemaker – from the short training they had got, would be very serviceable, but as they were quiet, agreeable fellows, and nothing but pulling and hauling expected from them, they got on pretty well. It is indispensable that every one on board of a ship should have a knife. One day when the ship was being put about, the poor weaver was ordered to let go a rope called a brace, which is used for hauling round the yards on which the sails are stretched, he having been placed there for that purpose. Unfortunately for him, some person had hung up a shirt on the shrouds to dry, and when he let go the brace the sleeve of the shirt got into the block through which the rope was running, and stopped it. The captain, seeing him tugging away trying to pull the shirt out of the block, shouted to him to “Cut away the sleeve;” but he had no knife. As soon as we got the ship on the other tack, Tomlinson was called aft and questioned about his knife, when it turned out that he had sold it for grog.

He was ordered to strip at once. His comrade, the shoemaker, was ordered to tie him up and give him three dozen lashes; and, by way of solace, to rub a handful of salt pickle over the bleeding back. It makes one shudder to think of it. Such a list of disasters and acts of tyranny will give you a very bad opinion of my new trade. The picture, however, has two sides, and, although what I have told is all *quite true*, yet there are some redeeming qualities.

It is well known that seamen, as a class, are of a jovial, reckless temperament, disposed to look at everything on the bright side, unwilling to look for breakers a-head, desirous to bear up unflinchingly under privations and fatigue which would dishearten and paralyse almost any other class of men, and it is well for them that it is so, as, in a general way, what they consider comfort is only misery in disguise. When the weather is good, and anything at all like justice is done to them, they are very cheerful among themselves, and keep their spirits up by spinning long yarns respecting great enjoyments experienced on bygone occasions, on going ashore with pockets full of money; mixed up with hairbreadth escapes in storm or battle – and, it appears the rule is, that he who spends the largest sum in the shortest time carries the palm. You will naturally consider this mode of amusement to be very unsound and irrational, and that it is a most dangerous school for me and other young people, who are required to move in such society, and you are right. But the great wickedness, and total *absence* of everything like true *rational enjoyment* in the indulgence of the low animal propensities here boasted of, are often their own antidote. There are some more rational and exciting things turning up occasionally which tend to make one overlook the dark spots in the calendar. There is some true gratification in beholding the wide expanse of blue water, extending as far as the horizon on every hand, like a gigantic meadow without a fence – without a speck on its

surface except our own little ark, bounding along like a thing of life; while overhead, the sky looks as if a tremendous punch bowl had been *whummeled*, with its rim resting on the water, the sun blazing down from the centre of it, while, at night,

“Look how the floor of heaven,
Is thick laid with patines of bright gold;
There’s not the smallest orb which thou behold’st,
But in his motion like an angel sings –
But while this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.”

Again in the morning, a red blush shoots up out of the darkness in the lower rim of the bowl to the Eastward. There is no twilight here – as soon as the sun sets it is dark, and no light till his edge rises out of the water in the morning. A circular silvery whiteness emerges gradually from the sea, and the whole surface of the water to the Eastward looks exactly as if a crimson carpet was spread over it, glittering along its whole surface, with golden flowers. Then, again, in the evening, you see him dip his lower edge into the water, with a return of the lovely carpet, adorned not unfrequently with fringes of cloud of every shade and hue. All this has a tendency to steal the mind away from its personal grievances to things more worthy of the contemplation of an immortal spirit.

Social matters, too, sometimes assume a more cheerful aspect. We had a great day of fun and frolic lately on *crossing the line*. You know, geographers have divided the surface of the globe into Zones, by three imaginary lines – the Equator or centre; the Tropic of Cancer, in twenty-three and a half degrees North; and that of Capricorn, the same distance South of the centre, which comprehend is called the Torrid Zone, North and South of which lies the Temperate and Frigid Zones.

It is an established custom that every sailor crossing one or other of these lines for the first time must be *brothered*, by

being sworn to obey certain rules, and be shaven by Neptune's barber. It is presupposed that the old god of the sea is constantly on the lookout for greenhorns, so that none can or dare pass till he undergoes the operation. As the time approaches, preparations are made for the ceremony. A puncheon is cut through the middle, one half set on the deck and filled with water – a piece of board is laid across it for the victim to sit upon – a bucket of slush from the cook, some tar, and other not very savoury ingredients are added, as a substitute for soap – a tar brush, and a bit of iron hoop well notched, for brush and razor. One of the old salts is rigged out to look as grotesque as possible, and at the proper time hails the ship from the head with the question, "Any lubbers a-board?" He is answered, and desired to walk aft, and orders the green ones to be produces. Two hands go below and bring one up, carefully blindfolded, and seat him on the board, when Neptune commences to ask him a number of questions, which it is not necessary to write, gives him certain instructions for his future observance, which I also beg to leave unrecorded, while all the time the barber is busy; lathering the poor fellow's face from the slush bucket, and when he opens his mouth to answer, the brush is daubed into it. He is then scraped with the hoop razor, the board drawn from under him, and he is left to get out the best way he can. When all are gone over, a general scrimmage takes place – every one dashing bucket of water in the face of everyone he meets, finishing up with a double allowance of grog.

Such incidents, though of a rough but characteristic nature, serve to smooth down the harsh points in a sailor's life, otherwise it would be intolerable. The very changes of the weather, too, have their effect in relieving the monotony of the sailor's days; - the excitement and danger consequent on battle and storm, relieved by the extremes of victory or defeat, and calm. Even a calm, though by no means a desirable thing in

general, has its peculiar features, well worth the notice of one who loves to look upon nature in all its moods. Since we came into the Torrid Zone we have experienced several of those calms for days together, which have peculiar features of their own, nowhere else to be met with; that total absence of motion in the air and water, as if they had fallen into everlasting sleep; the sun blazing like a fiery furnace, and the water like polished glass.

You are gazing listlessly over the glorious mirror when its surface is agitated – perhaps just alongside – by a shoal of flying-fish, rising like larks from a stubble field, and in the centre of them a monster fish springing perpendicularly out of the water to the height of fifteen or twenty feet, turning himself and plunging head foremost down, till the sea foams again. The sailors call him *albacoar*; he swims at a lower level than the flying-fish, for whom he keeps a sharp outlook, makes a rush upwards like a rocket in the centre of the shoal, securing a mouthful of the poor things as he passes through them. You will please to take notice that he is not a puny fellow like a Bladnoch, or Water-of-Cree salmon, but a respectable monster of some fifteen feet long, with a body like a horse, so that the whole thing is truly grand in its line. The flying-fish is a very great natural curiosity. It is about seven inches in length, rather a clumsy, stupid-looking head, with large prominent eyes – a wise provision, for, like the hare on land, which has a similar formation of the eye, it has no friends, every one who finds them slays them. It tapers quickly in its whole length, but the great distinguishing feature in the fish is its wing-shaped fins. You know the dragon-fly; the shoulder fins of the fish exactly resemble the thin, transparent wings of the fly, on a larger scale, being about three inches long by two broad. When disturbed, it rises two or three feet out of the water, skims along, touching the water now and then to moisten its wings. I saw one rise so high as to fall on the deck of our ship. Perhaps fifty yards is the

average length of their flight.

Another curiosity is the little bird called by sailors, – they don't go to natural history for their names, – Mother Carey's chicken. Who Mother Carey was, who hatched the first of the class, I could never learn. The proper name is the Stormy Petrel. This little bird very much resembles the long-winged swallow we used to call the martin. All the natural histories which I have seen fail to give a satisfactory account of its habits. Where or how it hatches its young, whether webfooted or not, are things I never could learn. The sailors will gravely tell you that it hatches its eggs UNDER its wing, – resembling much the tale I have heard, that St. Patrick, when the Irish savages beheaded him, fled and swam back to Scotland with his head in his teeth. My own experience of its habits is – it is not gregarious, although occasionally two or three may be seen under the eye at one time. I never saw it except far, far at sea, even in the middle of the Atlantic, skimming along the surface, but never in the water.

We made the island of St. Jago, one of the Cape de Verd group, on a Sunday morning, and while running down for a channel which divides it from another small island, a very singular circumstance occurred. There is in those waters a species of short, thick, bluish-looking fish, about eight or ten pounds weight. They swim in shoals, and it would seem – from our experience – very quick. It was a lovely clear day; we were staggering away under all sail going at the rate of ten knots, when to our utter astonishment, a flight of Bonitoes rose on the weather side, like a flock of flying fish, leaping right at the ship. Numbers were observed to strike the ship's side and drop into the water, while a few – as some asserted – leapt clear over us. Several fell on deck, and one – the most extraordinary of all – dropped down the cabin hatchway, and nearly frightened the life out of poor Pat, the Irish steward, at whose feet it alighted and

fluttered its life out. Whether they had not observed the ship in time to stop, or from whatever other cause, the thing was quite foreign to the general habits of the fish. The oldest seamen had never witnessed anything of the kind before, and the occurrence was duly entered in the log-book and journals as a remarkable fact.

While speaking of fish, I may tell you how we take the shark, about which we have heard so much, and which is always a very exciting business. He is never seen except in calm weather, when the ship is going slowly through the water – oftener still in a dead calm. I believe the true genuine Tropical Shark is almost a distinct species, never met with in temperate water, having little or no affinity with the overgrown dog-fish – the shark of the temperate clime. The dog-fish certainly closely resembles the true shark, both in shape and voracious habits. So does the mackerel of the North Sea closely resemble the lovely dolphin of the South, both in shape and variety of colours. “But what a falling off is there,” both in size and lovely hues, in the mackerel compared with his brilliant brother of the south. Don’t think I am wishing you to believe that, because the shark is a Tropical fish he is also a beauty! He is an ugly, long, black monster. The very sight of him slowly moving round the ship, with his black fin two feet above the water, his broad snout and small eyes, and the altogether villainous look of the fellow, make one shiver, even when at a safe distance. There can be little doubt but the many abominable tricks of which he is well known to have been guilty have a tendency to beget this very unpleasant feeling, which is, more or less, shared in by every one when looking on him in the water. Bad as he is, however, he is much lied on. It is quite true he will tear up a living man as if he were a dead dog, if he find him in the water, but the tales we have heard of his leaping out of the water to snatch people out of a boat, or of the deck of a ship, are all arrant lies.

“Such tales are told at wake or gossiping,
When it draws near to witching time of night;”

but they are quite at variance with the natural habits of the fish. We have been told, too, he will follow a ship for days, even weeks, when there is sickness among the crew, waiting for the corpse to be thrown overboard. This is exceedingly absurd. One fact confutes it. Allowing a corpse to be thrown daily from that ship, the fish would not dine a bit the better; the method of burial would deprive him of his prey. The corpse of a sailor is carefully sewed up in the hammock, into the foot of which is put a weight of shot sufficient to sink it at once far below the depth to which fish descend in the main ocean. As I have said before, the shark frequently appears hovering round a vessel during a calm – but more frequently while at anchor. This is quite natural, in whatever state of health a crew may be – as there are few hours in which there is not something thrown overboard; and as all its “fish comes to its net” – he ensconces himself under the ship’s bottom and misses nothing. Captain Basil Hall tells of one which attended his ship in the harbour of Havanna in the isle of Cuba which they at last caught, and when opened they found a bullock’s hide with the horns attached, which they had thrown overboard the day before. There are also lies told about his size. The oldest sailors I ever heard speak of him, spoke of twelve – or at most fourteen feet, being the length of the largest I ever saw. Like the dogfish and the freshwater pike – which is the river shark – they have no scales, the skin is thick and serrated, like a smith’s *risp*, and when dried is used for polishing hard wood. When one is seen floating about, the word passes along, and all hands are allowed to join in the fun. There is a hook as thick as your little finger, a mess of beef is put on the hook; and a rope fixed to the chain. The bait is thrown to the fish, who is as well as if on deck. When he sees it he rushes furiously, gives himself a turn to one side, and seizes it; he has to give half a turn

to catch it, as his upper jaw projects a little. It sometimes happens that the hook gets only a partial hold of his jaw, and he breaks away. It is no matter how much his jaw is lacerated – he has it the second time, and no mistake. When hooked he is allowed to flounder about, the sailors taking delight in tormenting him. When both parties are tired a running noose of a rope is passed down the line, and drawn tight round his body, when he is lifted as easily as a child out of its cradle, although eleven feet long, and thick in proportion. I speak of one we caught of Cape Verde. Gasping in the agony of death, one of the crew shoved the end of a capstan bar – a piece of English oak four inches square – into his mouth, which he made all crunch again. I cannot take leave of this, the seaman's greatest abhorrence – next to Davy Jones, the true sea devil – without telling you of a remarkable fact in natural history – similar in nature to, and quite as unaccountable as the attendance of the small bird on the cuckoo. A large shark is always accompanied by a small fish, say about six inches long, with longitudinal stripes of light green and black, and which is seen constantly floating above the monster's head. The sailors call it a pilot fish.

On opening up the east side of St. Jago, a landscape lay spread out, of surpassing loveliness. Imagine a deeply indented bay, concave in form, of considerable width, with a lovely white sandy beach; suppose this concavity to stretch up the face of a very high mountain, widening as it advances, sloping gradually away to the westward for many miles, exactly resembling a gigantic fan with the sides elevated, dotted over its hole surface with clumps of trees and shrubs in full bloom – a glorious tropical sun blazing into it with a force which poor old Scotland never felt – and you have a faint idea of its beauty. These islands lie in about fifteen degrees of west longitude, and about the same of north latitude; and though necessarily very warm, yet there was a balminess in the breeze that was very pleasant, while we

were bounding away southeastward to catch the the African coast at the point we wanted, under the influence of a steady trade wind.

The most enviable position, however, in which we can be placed has its alloy, for which we are in the habit of blaming our *very great* grandmother; and amid this luxury of feeling, from natural objects, we had a serious draw back in our physical comfort, which had been in operation – as I told you before – for some time, from the different articles of food having become exhausted, or unserviceable. This was the cause of an everlasting grumble and much unnecessary swearing at every meal. It is the custom in our country, on sitting down to a meal to ask a blessing on it. This good rule is reversed here. When the meat and bread are divided into portions, as is duly done at every meal, instead of expressing thankfulness, every one commences cursing his own eyes and limbs in particular, if ever he was on board of such a bloody hooker in his life, and expressing a general wish that the ship, captain and owners, all and sundry, may be sent to a certain place which need not be named.

As far as I am able to judge, sailors are a very distinct and peculiar class. Going young to the business their habits are all formed on one model; and being confined for such lengthened periods without intercourse with the world outside, they necessarily fall into the speech and habits of the older class, and, in a general way, exhibit little, if any, desire for mental improvement. There are exceptions; but the rule is indolent indifference. And being so much dependent on one another for personal comfort, they become kind, openhearted and generous, “humorous as winter, with a hand open as day to melting charity.” A recklessness of consequences and blindness of the future are also strong features in their character. A morbid attachment to their profession is also strongly marked; all and everything must give place to the superiority of him whose home is on the mighty deep. The

desire for wealth is deemed a meanness unworthy of any one except the lowest wretch. Every landsman is a lubber or a fop, a soldier or marine is an animal of supreme contempt, of whom one sailor could put at least, three "hors de combat," with much ease. Perhaps it is in consequence of their isolation that they form such strong attachments to their mates and vessels; one word of censure against either of which would assuredly procure a black eye or something as bad. In the case of the character of his ship, however, he is not quite consistent. When there is short allowance, or extra duty to be done, she is the worst he ever saw, and he, with great energy, consigns her and all concerned to the most undesirable places; but if a boat's crew from another vessel come aboard, or he go ashore in a foreign port, she is the finest ship, and the best sailer he ever was aboard of. He will allow no one to find fault but himself.

We made the mainland of Africa at Rio Cestos in about five degrees of north latitude, and came to anchor in the offing on the open coast, as there are no harbours nor navigable rivers in the district. In a short time we were surrounded by a large fleet of small canoes, with two men in each, as naked as the hour they were born. I gazed on this wonderful spectacle in a state of perfect bewilderment. It was a scene worth coming all the way to look upon; and the effect of the first glimpse of it produced – I will leave you to guess the sensation, as I cannot describe it. I had seen black men in Liverpool – that is, their hands and faces – but to see them stalking along the deck as naked as Adam before he put on his first apron, was altogether a very different affair. As you never saw one, and I have now been in close contact with them every day for some months, I will endeavour to give you a faint outline of one as I see him in this state of nature. He is about the common height; his arms and body well formed, and in proportions good; head of a large size, thickly covered with a mass of black hair, so short and curly that it looks

exactly like a block thickly covered with ripe sloes; beard scanty, as it is plucked out when forming; little hair on the body generally. A phrenologist would, in a general way, consider the head of an average type. In a large majority of cases, the animal propensities are fully developed, while the moral and intellectual organs are defective – the peculiar formation of the face and forehead being unfavourable to the full development of the intellectual organs, owing, not so much to the *lowness* as to the quick receding backward *slope* of the *brow* and the *upturned* carriage of the face, which is so general a geature among them. The face is very peculiar. The eyes large, full, black as sloes, and well placed; the nose broad and flat, nostrils very large; mouth large, with lips out of all proportion thick; teeth large, white as ivory, regularly well set, and kept scrupulously clean; chin large; cheeks well formed; the face oval; and in spite of the ugly nose and lips there is not that savage expression one would expect in the circumstances. The lovely eyes and teeth have a great deal to do in relieving the awkward conformation of the mouth and nose, the eyes in particular, from their mild and even benevolent expression when in repose; but when roused in anger no thunder cloud is more protentious. The lower limbs are very defective, particularly the legs and feet. There is nothing of that bend in the knees which we call *bandy-legged*, but a peculiar curve in the thin shin bone, and want of fullness of brawn which is common in the lib of the pale-faced tribes, that takes away much, both from its beauty and strength. The ankle-bones are large; feet large and out of all proportion; soles quite flat, and totally devoid of the elegant curve which adds both strength and gracefulness to the Dircassian tribes in their movements, and the want of which causes that shuffling, waddling motion of the children of Ham. This malformation, though the general rule, is by no means universal; a good number of both sexes are as handsome in person and have as regualr and well-proportioned

features, with heads as well formed as any people of any country. The skin of all shades, from ebony to a dirty brown, very soft and of velvet texture, and kept well rubbed with vegetable oil to prevent the sun from parching it. They are cleanly in their habits; and as they have no spoons, knives, or forks, they use the right hand exclusively in handling their victuals – even in taking soup, which they scoop up with their curved fingers very dexterously. The left hand is invariably employed in every servile job; and they are often put to great inconvenience when using both hands to prevent touching anything dirty with the right; they will not even scratch their head with it. They have no written language; when spoken it has a very pleasant effect on the ear, soft and full of vowels. There is nothing astonishes them so much as to see the white man write and another read and understand it; and they expect the reading party to put the paper to his *ear* instead of his eyes, and to make *paper speak* is to them perfectly incomprehensible. If anything can be pleaded as an apology for doing wrong, their ignorance and the want of means of information have a strong claim on the sympathies of educated men, particularly of those in possession of the Bible; and in few cases, I believe, is apology and forbearance more needed than in theirs. In cunning and prevarication they are unmatched; lying and stealing done upon fixed principles and upon all occasions in the highest perfection; and looseness of intercourse between the sexes very prevalent.

A certain amount of knowledge respecting a Supreme Being they undoubtedly possess – and from what I have already witnessed, they perform acts of worship with much earnestness. What amount of power in the way of averting evil they ascribe to this spirit – or Fetich – as they call it, I have no means of knowing; but one act of worship I was performed many times every day. Every man wears a narrow strap of leather round his wrist, into which is inserted a small shell called a cowrie. Upon

every occasion, on receiving a glass of spirits – of which they are very fond – before drinking it, they invariably pour a small drop upon the Fetich shell by way of an offering. I have often, too, seen individuals dropping a little overboard – some say- to propitiate the shark. Another plain and palpable act of worship I was witness to very lately, when ashore with the boat. It happened on Sunday, but I suppose this was an accidental circumstance. There was an immense crowd gathered, – an open space in the centre of considerable extent; all the crowd were seated, while in the centre space a woman of middle age, with a piece of cotton cloth around her loins, looking grave, was dancing in her own peculiar way, and with all her might. The inside row of the sitters were furnished with a kind of vegetable gourd upon which they kept beating, as an apology for music, the whole group seeming very seriously interested. How long she danced before I came in sight I do not know. I looked on a considerable time, and left her labouring away as fervently as ever, but getting exhausted. Meeting a man whom I had seen on board, I asked him what it all meant, when he told me that Fetich had fallen, or lighted on her, and that was all the information he could give: – but it was quite evident that she considered herself under the influence of a spirit; and the whole thing an act of worship.

Our first object being to lay in a stock of rice for the slaves on the “middle passage,” that is the run across the Atlantic to the West Indies, and this being a low marshy district where rice is grown, we commenced at once to trade for that article. You will naturally think that it must be difficult to transact business with these people, from ignorance of their language, but they have been for so many years trading with the English that all the *traders* have broken English enough for the purpose. As trade is all done on the principle of exchanging one piece of goods for another here, I will endeavour to tell you the way. The rule is

that all kinds of goods are priced by the number of *bars* they are worth. To understand this you must imagine a bar of lead about fifteen inches long by two inches square, and that is the standard for everything. In this way a musket may be worth ten bars, a keg of powder twenty bars, so many yards of cloth a bar, &c. As the demand and supply regulate the value of everything in the trading world, the value of the *bar* is affected, and the rises and falls, but still it is the standard as an equivalent for a certain quality of goods.

In purchasing a slave the seller can have a part of every kind of goods, say four muskets equal to forty bars; a keg of powder, twenty bars; ten lead bars; keg rum, twenty bars; hardware, ten bars; tobacco, beads, cloth, twenty bars. Total – less or more according to the value of the slave, so that supposing the bar worth one shilling and sixpence, the goods specified above would purchase a slave worth about nine pounds sterling, which at present is about the price of a prime slave.

The rice trade is a very irksome business, as they bring over everything in their canoes, which are small on this part of the coast. They cannot bring a bushel at a trip; and as we lie a long way from the shore, and obliged to keep moving about from one trading place to another as the stocks get exhausted, it is altogether a very tedious affair. Besides, the rascals are so very cunning, they would not bring a large quantity at once although they had the means of conveyance, as, in order to enhance its value, they pretend the article is very scarce, and almost every time they come they say it is their last cargo, and demand a higher price.

On leaving the windward coast, we ran, what is called *down* the coast, which means sailing eastward, into the Bight of Benin; and, as the wind blows almost constantly from the westward, sailing eastward is called running down the coast –

and vice versa. During our progress we called at every trading place, picking up all the rice and gold dust we could get; and I could not help observing, when bargaining with the captain, their utter disregard for the truth, and ravenous propensity for stealing – that everlasting lie of scarcity of the article wanted, in order to enhance its value being put forth on all occasions. In the article of gold dust they lied always. The gold is got in small particles, washed down from the high lands, and – in the dry seasons – in the beds of the rivers. It is in very small particles resembling sand of all degrees of fineness. I seldom saw a particle above the size of a garden pea. They bring it in small boxes, the largest holding perhaps one ounce. Their rule is, however, that – no matter how much they may have at home – the full of the box is all they bring at once, although it is quite common for the same individual to return several times, in the same day, always complaining about the difficulty of procuring it.

I said before that they bring all we want aboard. Indeed, independant of the difficulty of landing a boat, from the heavy surf on the beach, it is only in such places as Cape Coast where there is a fortress with soldiers, that it would be safe to land: – for, even though they possibly might keep possession till redeemed at a high price.

All the natives bred near the sea are vey expert swimmers. I sometimes amuse myself by getting a few tobacco pipes – of which they are very fond – and when there are perhaps a dozen canoes along-side, I hold the pipes up to show them into the water. Immediately a number of black fellows bolt headlong down after them. As the water is clear, it is very amusing to see them scrambling for the pipes at a great depth; and in a very short time, bolt – bolt – pop up one wooly head after another, those who have got one shewing their teeth in high glee; and you may be sure none of the pipes are lost. When going into the canoe

from the ship, a native does not wait to go down the side, as we do, into the boat; he steps on to the rail – some fifteen feet above the water- stretches his arms above his head and clasps his fingers, keeps his head right between his arms, throws himself head foremost right down, his legs crossed. He thus enters the water like a wedge, without any splash, his head protected by his hands and arms, and goes a long way down, turns and bolts up, shakes the water from his black wool, jumps into his canoe, and paddles away – his skin, being well oiled, quite dry. When swimming, he raises one arm quite out of the water, throws it out its full length before him, draws up the reverse leg, spurs it back with great force, while he drags himself forward with his hand, throws out the other arm, draws up the other leg alternatively, going ahead the length of his arm stroke – turning the side of his head as he strikes out, to meet the water, which actually rushes off it as he dashes forward. I often wonder how he escapes the sharks. In propelling his canoe, he uses a paddle instead of our oar. It is a piece of hard wood four feet long, the under half made thin about six inches broad, the upper end rounded like the shaft of a spade. When in the canoe, he kneels down on his knees and toes, sitting on his heels, dips the paddle perpendicularly into the water, giving his body a jerk forward and the paddle backward. If it is a small canoe, he changes the paddle right and left alternately, to keep his course straight; if a large one, there are paddlers on both sides. Some of the paddles exactly resemble a plate stuck on to the end of a pot-stick.

Having completed our stock of rice and quantity of gold dust, we had now to commence the ivory trade, and as that article is more plentiful on the banks of the large rivers in the bight of Biafra, about ten degrees east from Cape Coast-Castle, we ran down to the river Camaroons to exchange our salt for elephants' tusks, before commencing to purchase slaves. The character of the country changes very much in proceeding

eastward from Cape Palmas to Cape Coast-Castle – a considerable fortress, garrisoned by soldiers belonging to the African Company – the residence of the English Governor, and head rendezvous of all English shipping in this quarter.

The general appearance of the country from Cape Palmas to Cape Coast-Castle, looking from the sea, is pretty uniform, of a low, undulating character, rock and sandy beach alternating, with an occasional bluff headland, and the whole country one continued green forest – not an acre of green field to be seen; while such is the weight of surf, which constantly rolls in along the whole distance (about one hundred miles) that, except at a few places during calm weather, no boat can land; all communication must be made by canoes. One remarkable feature of the grain, gold, and ivory coasts, is the entire absence of harbours. To such an extent is this the case, that from Sierra Leone to the river Bonny – a distance of nearly five hundred miles – there is neither harbour nor navigable river to shelter in. One thing, however, must not be forgot – the bottom is generally what sailors call good holding ground, so that the want of harbour is less felt.

On running down to the eastward from Cape Coast, the face of the country assumes a new character. The same everlasting forest still continues, but the land is more diversified, rising into hills, even high mountains, inland; while on every eminence is seen, at intervals, – as if planted by the landscape gardener for effect – towering above all others, the lovely cocoa-nut tree. It rises to the height of eighty, ninety, or one hundred feet, of a clean, beautiful, tapering stem, without a branch. It then throws out round its apex circular rows of branches resembling our common fern or braken, as we call it, in the form of an umbrella, the first row say twenty feet long, the others diminishing to the top, while round the root of these feathery branches grow the nuts. When full grown, the nut, with its husk, is a great, clumsy-

looking thing, about the size of the head of a young calf, and much of the same shape. The natives manufacture many useful articles of the husk, such as ropes and mats, it being of a tough, fibrous quality. The nut itself is egg-shaped, say seven inches long and the same in circumference in the thickest part; the shell about one-fourth of an inch thick, of a remarkably hard substance. Round the inside of the shell, and closely adhering to it, is a white hard substance of about three-eighths of an inch thick, of a very pleasant taste, and wholesome and nourishing quality. The space inside of this kernel will hold about two gills, and is filled with a liquid resembling milky-coloured water, of a very pleasant tartish taste, cold as from a spring well. But it is impossible for me to describe the pleasant sensation one experiences while drinking this refreshing beverage from a fresh-pulled cocoa-nut while one's body is roasting in ninety or a hundred degrees of heat. There is one remarkable provision of Providence in the formation of this shell which struck me very forcibly. At the upper or narrow end of it there are two small holes within an inch of each other, quite through the shell, that are sealed up with a softer material, which can be removed by the bill of a bird who lives on such substances, and from which we extract the milky juice. Without this wise provision, nothing but the hand of man, armed with a heavy hammer or hand-saw, could extract the nourishing and refreshing contents of these shells, while to every other animal they would they would for ever remain hermetically sealed.

The bay and entrance to the Cameroons River is very grand. It discharges itself into the Bight of Biafra, in north latitude 5 degrees, and 10 degrees of east longitude, from Greenwich. On the west side of the small bay the land is very high, and covered to the summit with wood. At the foot of this mountain is a small island, called Bimby, of great beauty; while in the offing, a few miles distant, rises the huge mountain island

of Fernando Po. The entrance to the river is two miles wide for some distance, when a lovely bay spreads away to the right for miles, surrounded, except at the entrance, by low land closely covered with small trees and shrubs; while the river extends due north, inland, gradually losing its sea character, and assuming that of a huge, broad, muddy, sluggish mass of almost boiling water, which has "dragged its slow length along" through hundreds of miles of mud or burning sand, and here discharges its pestiferous waters into the great southern Atlantic Sea.

While at anchor here, waiting for a black pilot to take us up the river, the captain took a notion to go a-shooting and fishing with a net at the head of the loch. We started, the captain and doctor with guns, the third mate, four seamen, and myself to steer the boat. After making a few draughts with the net, and taking a few fish, the shooters went into the wood, while Kinnon, the mate, and I went away along the lovely beach in high glee, it being the first time he had his foot on *terra firma* since he left Liverpool. It was a very pleasant place, and we wandered on a long way, round a point of land, quite out of sight of the seamen who stayed by the boat. While amusing ourselves and talking of home—he belonged to Kirkdale, in Kirkcudbrightshire—we heard two shots in the wood, when we put about to go back to the boat. We had not gone far till we heard a rush among the shrubbery, and an animal bolted on to the sand within twenty yards of us. I had not time to get a right look at the creature, till Kinnon bolted at the top of his speed, shouting "Run, Sam, there's a tiger." Had I waited to bring my slender knowledge of natural history to bear upon the subject, I might have found out he was wrong, as tigers are found only in Asia; but considering "discretion the better part of valour," I gave chase, and soon passed the mate; and as we rounded the point, the captain and doctor came out of the wood a little before us. On Kinnon telling his story, they laughed immoderately, and the thing was a

standing joke against us for a time; our tiger turned out to be a harmless animal, which had been fired at, and was as glad to get quit of us as we were to get quit of it.

We started up the river next morning. While crossing the bar – which is a bank of sand and mud which gathers at the mouth of all rivers where the salt and fresh water meet – the water was so shallow that the keel was ploughing up the mud all the way across it. In positions of this kind, where the depth of the water is not well known, a seaman is appointed to “heave the lead,” to ascertain exactly what depth of water is under the ship. It is done in this way: – There is a broad piece of wood projecting from the ship’s side, opposite the masts, principally intended for fixing the “deadeys,” or blocks for fastening the shrouds or strong ropes which steady the masts on each side. On this projection stands the leadsman with a piece of rope tound his chest, the ends of which are fast to the shrouds, leaving slack enough for him to lean quite over the water, with his arms at perfect liberty. The hand lead is about nine inches long by two-and-a-half, tapering gradually; at the upper end is a hole through which a line is fixed, marked at every six feet or fathom by pieces of woolen cloth of different colours, the colour of the rag denoting the number of fathoms of depth. The man coils as much of the line up in his left hand as he finds necessary, according to the rate at which the ship is going. Grasping the line with his right hand, within a proper distance from the lead, he swings the lead several times round and heaves it with all his might toward the ship’s head, letting the slack line go. The lead drops opposite the bowsprit, and by the time it comes opposite the man it is perpendicular, he gives it a *stump* on the bottom, and sings out in a musical cadence the depth of the water. Suppose he finds five fathoms, or thirty feet, he sings out, “by the mark five;” if it is *under* the mark, he shouts, “quarter less five;” if *over*, he says, “and a quarter five;” and so on, as the case may be. There

is a deep sea lead, not necessary to describe. In our progress up the river, I was standing eagerly watching the man at the lead, as it was the first time I had seen the operation, and delighted with the musical tones of the grim old salt as he sang out the depths, when a large brown object floated past on the surface of the water. The old fellow had just drawn up his lead when a large turtle – for it was one – came abreast of him. He let the lead drop on the shell of the animal, when it dived in an instant.

By this time the river was contracted to three-fourths of a mile wide, and thirty feet deep – a slow, muddy, unpleasant-looking stream, the banks down to the water's edge, covered with trees of immense size, sleeping under a blaze of sunshine, hot enough to cook a beefsteak, and so perpendicular, that were a stone to drop from the sun it would be sure to break somebody's skull. Up this ditch we wrought our weary way for about seventy miles, without seeing a "thing of life," except the turtle and a few birds of rich plumage floating among the trees. We arrived at last at a settlement of the natives on the east side of the river, and let go the anchor, when we were surrounded in a few minutes by canoes. We found other three ships, which was a very desirable thing, as the natives of this district are considered of a savage and untrustworthy character; so it behoved us to keep a very sharp look out.

The first thing to be done was to load all the cannon with grape and canister shot – get all the small arms at hand, and our boarding nettings up. This is a net-work of small rope surrounding the ship, fixed to the bulwarks and high up the rigging, so that no one can get aboard without cutting his way through. This was done, and no one admitted on deck except he had ivory, or some marketable article in his canoe, for which salt was given in exchange. This being a heavy wooded and well-watered district, elephants are numerous, and their tusks – the true ivory – a regular article of commerce; and as only the male

animal produces them, and only one tusk in each side of the upper jaw, and considering that he must be at least forty years of age before his tusks are full grown, it is truly wonderful to see the number brought to market. It is also wonderful to see the enormous size they grow. I am fourteen years old, and stout of my age; and I assure you that I have seen many of these tusks which required all my strength to rear on end and lift clear of the deck. They were as thick at the jaw end as old John Gullin's thigh, and you know that was no twitter, and measuring even seven feet long.

Our stay in the Camaroons was made as short as possible, nothing of any importance occurring during it. We never had a boat in the water all the time, and as little intercourse with the natives as possible. They keep large fires burning during the night, perhaps to scare wild beasts very little removed below their own savage nature; wild yells of revelry indicating enjoyment of some sort, but of what nature we had no means of knowing nor any desire to inquire into. You may be sure it was a "consummation devoutly to be wished" by all when the trade came to an end, and we turned our head in the direction of the blue water. During our progress down, however, we had one of the most anxious nights which I believe any of us ever passed, either here or anywhere else.

Before dark, we were down to where the tide reached, and affected the depth of the river by its rise and fall. The night was dark, and the trees towering up each bank shut us up as in a grave. The consequence was, we ran aground on a bank close to the east side of the river, and stuck fast, within twenty yards of the wood. This was no joke. Had the honest fellows we had been doing business with found out our position, the odds would have been much against your ever seeing this letter; and the Lady Neilson, crew and cargo, including your old school-fellow, would have disappeared, and,

“Like the baseless fabric of a vision,
Left not a wreck behind.”

All we could do was to put out every light, arm everybody, keep perfectly quiet, and wait for high water and daylight. Both came in due time, and thank God, we got safe off.

About noon we reached the sea, and anchored close in with Bimby Island for the night, intending to start next morning to beat up to Cape Coast and commence purchasing slaves. In the course of the night a canoe with four black fellows came alongside and wished to speak with the captain. Next morning brought out the secret. The Captain came on deck early, ordering the launch – the largest boat we had – to be got over the side, and a swivel gun – a small cannon which will discharge a ball about a pound weight – to be fixed in her bow. Shortly after he came up with a cutlass slung, and pistols in his belt, told off fifteen men into the boat well armed. It was a delightful morning, one of those which poor old Scotland never has – nor ever will see – the water like a mirror, when away they swept right for a sandy bay on the island. When close in with the land a few muskets were fired out of the wood at the boat without injury, when bang went the swivel and a few muskets from the boats – the cutter had also gone. They were run right on to the sand, and the whole crew jumped ashore and charged up the rising ground. There was no more firing nor any of the crew hurt. Late in the afternoon the boats came off, heavily laden with divers articles; among which were two twelve pound cannons, two large chests of carpenter's tools, of all descriptions, besides many other things of value. The most valuable part of the spoil, however, was a young Irishman, who had bribed the canoe men to come off the night before to solicit the Captain's aid.

His story ran thus: A number of years ago a countryman of his had landed on Bimby Island, from a ship going up the Camaroons, possessed of a large quantity of goods suitable for

the trade of the district, and being a person of great courage and persevering energy he succeeded in establishing himself on the island. By some means or other he managed to get into the good graces of Bimby Jack – as the cheif of the island pleased to style himself. Old Paddy was not only the only white man in the place, but for hundreds of miles round about it. About two years before we arrived, the poor fellow whom we had rescued had been persuaded to leave his ship and join the first settler. During the time we were up the river the old man had died, and as the natives never stood in awe of the young man, they at once began to plunder the establishment. By heavy bribes he managed to secure a body guard of the scoundrels who sat beside him during the day which passed between the death of his master and our arrival, pretending to protect him while their confederates were plundering his property. Had he not succeeded in bribing the canoe men to come off to us, it is more than likely it would have been all over with him and the remainder of his stuff.

Next morning we weighed anchor and stood away up to the westward, and as the wind blows constantly from that quarter, causing besides a strong current eastwards, it is a much more serious affair to get back to the windward coast than to run down, as both wind and current are against it.

Having finished our trade in gold and ivory, as soon as we reached Cape Palmas we commenced purchasing slaves. In order to do so it is necessary to keep constantly moving along the coast – some-times having to let go the anchor, and get under weigh again many times in one day, which, together with taking in and setting sail so often, makes the process a very fatiguing one for the crew, in such a climate, What makes it necessary to be so much on the move is, that we may call at half-a-dozen places scattered over many miles of coast for the same number of slaves, returning over the same course, in a day or two another small lot may be got, just as the supply comes in from the interior.

Besides, there are a number of ships on the alert, which, of course, makes the article more scarce. We have heard long tales about the crews of Guinea-men going ashore in bands, armed to the teeth, hunting up and carrying off indiscriminately whomsoever they could lay hands upon. I cannot tell whether this ever was the custom or not – perhaps it might have been done.

My intention, when I commenced these letters to you, was to give you a *true* narrative of what came under my own observation – paying no respect whatever to the tales of others. For the *rude* and *homely* style in which I may convey these *truths* I make no apology, but I pledge myself that truth shall be told. I shall “nought extenuate, nor aught set down in malice.” I am the advocate of no system – have no prejudice. I had a strong desire to get to sea, but the nature of the trade in which I might be employed was, to me, a matter of perfect indifference. Circumstances over which I had no control placed me in this very disagreeable trade. But, bad as it may be, I will not *lie* on it – as far as my judgment leads me, I will tell the truth.

Whether or not kidnapping was ever practiced, I have no means of knowing; but this I do know, that nothing of the kind *is*, or *can* be, done now. The poor creatures are brought off the canoes by their chiefs, or dealers, and regularly purchased and for, like any other marketable article. To make you understand the thing a little better, it is necessary for you to know that the present state of society in Africa very much resembles the Highland clan system with regard to classes, or rather a strong *anti-refinement* on the Highland system. In this part of Africa there are four classes – the king, or head chief, claiming jurisdiction over a district perhaps as extensive as the McCallum Mohr estates – with a lot of subordinate chiefs, who are the principal traders in slaves and all marketable wares, and who are in possession of a certain amount of power. The other two

grades are slaves – but of two distinct classes. All those born *in the home* establishment of the chiefs – such as the Highland gillies – are *domestic* slaves, who cannot be sold except they forfeit their privilege by getting into debt or crime. While all and every one of the lowest grade are slaves to somebody, and liable to be sold, one cannot look on these poor spiritless dejected naked creatures without a feeling of deep commiseration.

Having got our complement of slaves – two hundred and ninety-four – of whom two hundred and odds were male adults, the remainder women and youths of both sexes, none under fourteen years of age – and having business to transact at Cape Coast, Wineby, and Acra, three English fortresses, we ran down for that purpose. Cape Coast Castle stands on a rock on the water's edge, in five degrees of N. latitude, and on the meridian line of longitude with Greenwich, and on which are a few thirty-two-pounders. It is garrisoned by a few soldiers in the pay of the African Company, with a Governor and staff of officers, to watch over the commercial affairs of the district. A little to the east of the castle is a small sandy opening in the iron-bound shore through which canoes and ship's boats can pass in certain states of the surf. On the landward side of the fortress is a level space where a large town is built, inhabited by natives, and a few whites, as agents for trading companies, so that any one can land and walk about with perfect safety.

The houses are all built with mud, and all done by the women. I have watched them with much curiosity during the operations. On the outside of the town they have a large hole where they mix mud and water into the consistence of mortar, which is done by a lot of ladies tramping among it with their feet. Another party carry the prepared stuff on their heads in closely woven wicker baskets; and a few act as builders. A layer of stuff is laid, eighteen inches broad, all round the house, which the heat of the sun immediately hardens, and a house is raised in a few

days. The houses are roofed with poles, and thatched with palm leaves. All this is going on while the husbands of the poor women are lying lounging in the sunshine like a lot of pigs. They certainly have some excuse, as the most of them go out at night in their canoes to fish. On this coast the strong breeze which blows from the sea during the day dies away at sunset, and a light air from the land blows through the night. This breeze the lazy lubbers take the benefit of, hoist a bit of mat as sail, run out to the offing, and continue fishing till sunrise, when the land wind dies away, and they run in with the first of the sea breeze with their fish. They are sometimes employed, also, in carrying stuff to and from the ships in the roads. While old people are thus occupied, the young ones amuse themselves a great part of their time in the water, in the narrow inlet which forms the landing-place. I have stood for hours witnessing the manoeuvres of these little creatures of both sexes, from five to ten years of age, thus employed. Generally, three high seas or waves follow each other in succession, with intervals of lower ones. In proportion to the height of the wave – say fifteen feet – it recedes farther on its retreat, and leaves perhaps thirty yards of dry beach. Imagine a whole lot of these little creatures, each with a small piece of board, running out as far as the sea recedes, crouching down with a fast hold of the board between their legs – suppose a sea, plumb as a wall, coming right over them, careering like a racehorse, with the woolly heads of the whole company peeping through its surface like frogs in a pond; another moment, and they are thrown high and dry in a long black line in great glee, struggling to get up for another run. I have watched them often thus employed, and never saw one drawn back by the after tow.

I said that all went naked. This is true on the windward coast, with the exception of the King; but it is different at Cape Coast, no doubt in consequence of the number of white people resident there; and the rule is, they wear a piece of cloth round

their loins, and are a little more refined in their manner than the others. The higher class wear a scarf of cloth thrown round their shoulders, like a Scottish plaid, leaving the head, arms, legs, and feet naked. Ornaments of gold are also common, worn round the arms and legs, with lumps of it dangling among their hair, and even gold chains of native manufacture are frequently to be seen. They also spin, dye, and weave a kind of cloth of strong texture, with brilliant colours; smelt iron, and make war knives and other articles.

This being the dry season, the weather is very pleasant, the great heat tempered by the sea breeze. Since we have been so close to the land we have fared better by occasional supplies of vegetables, fruit, and fresh meat, so that we feel more comfortable, although a heavy grumble may sometimes be heard, far down in the chest of an old salt, but not so loud nor so long as during our passage out, when the oatmeal began to walk away on its own legs and the flour got exhausted.

The Governor of Winiby – a small port to the eastward of Cape Coast – having taken a passage with us to Damarera, we ran down to pick him up; and while there rather a singular affair occurred to me personally. I had to go ashore in the boat with the Captain, who went to the Fort, and the four seamen had also gone, leaving me in charge of the boat, which was drawn up on the sandy beach, about a mile from the town. I had put on my go-ashore hat to protect my eyes from the extreme blaze of the sun. Laying myself down in the stern sheets of the boat, under the impression that no one was near me, imagine my astonishment and alarm when a tall, naked savage seated himself very coolly on the gunwhale, eyeing me very attentively. I had presence of mind to assume a degree of courage which I really did not possess at the moment, and we sat and stared at one another for sometime without speaking. I told you that the natives along the shore speak broken English. At last he spoke

in a friendly way, asking me if I would give him anything were he to visit the ship, and a great lot of "disjointed chat," which I answered in an off-handed way, with as much firmness as I could command in the circumstances, though by no means feeling comfortable. This passed on for sometime, when he made a spring, seized my hat, and went off at the top of his speed toward the bush, about two hundred yards off. You will guess that it would not have been safe to follow a six-foot savage into an African forest, and I was exactly of the same opinion; and, to tell you the truth, I felt much relieved, though at the expense of my hat. The robber, however, did not go wholly unpunished, as, a few days after, a boat's crew went ashore at the same place, among whom was a stout black man, an American, who stripped himself and went in to bathe, when a tall fellow, exactly resembling my customer, snatched up his clothes and made off. He tried the trick once too often, however, as Keeny caught him in the bush and pounded him almost to a jelly.

A much more serious affair happened a few days after at the same place, a mutiny, or rising in rebellion of part of the crew to deprive the Captain of the command of the ship, headed by the chief mate, between whom and the Captain some misunderstanding had arisen. Mr Clarkson was an old man who had evidently seen better days, and also much hard service, and had got his left hand crushed severely while boarding an American privateer during the war. He had got a first-class education and was of gentlemanly manners and bearing. In the affair of the mutiny, however, he acted very unadvisedly. In his desire for revenge on my uncle, he tampered with the crew, and drew up a list in writing of some real and some imaginary grievances, and acts of mismanagement, and misconduct of the Captain during the voyage, which he induced the greater part of the crew to sign. One night Mr McKinnon, the third mate, told me what was afoot and said that I ought to inform my uncle at

once. Their scheme was to confine the Captain; and Clarkson, with a lot of his witnesses, was to go ashore to Mr Whitehead, governor of Winiby; state their case, and put my uncle ashore, Clarkson taking command of the ship. I lost no time in giving information, and at sunrise the Captain came on deck as cool as if nothing had happened, ordered four men into a boat, which was obeyed, he following with the log-book and journal, not a word having been spoken. In the course of a few hours the boat came alongside with a sergeant's command of soldiers armed, with an order to take Mr Clarkson ashore as a prisoner for mutiny. After all that had taken place, I felt exceedingly sorry to see the old gentleman put in a boat – it was my last sight of him. He was tried by court martial, and left to find his own way home as best he might. It was his business to keep the log-book, which is a record of everything transacted in the ship, and is squared up every day at twelve o'clock. In that book he had entered several things which he – inadvertently – charged in his list of grievances against my uncle, as his misdeeds alone, whereas, if anything was really wrong, he was as much to blame as the Captain. So ended this serious mutiny.

We ran down to Acra, and having got a stock of wood and water, goats, pigs, poultry, &c., for the use of the cabin and sick slaves, we sail in a day or two for Demarera, from which port you may expect my next – if I live to reach it. – I am, ever, truly
yours, S.R.



LETTER IV.

Demarera, October, 1800.

We sailed from Acra and stood away to the southward, crossed the equator a few degrees to catch the south-east trade wind to carry us to the American Continent, on which this settlement is situated, in about eight degrees of north latitude and sixty of west longitude; distance from Acra, between four and five thousand miles. We were much baffled by calms about the line – the sea as smooth as a sheet of ice, the heat exceedingly oppressive. In some measure to protect the crew and prevent the heat from splitting up the deck, a sheet of canvas, called an awning, was fixed to the railing on each side of the deck, with a centre rope along the top, stretching up the canvas like the roof of a house. Were it not for this screen, the intense heat would absolutely fry the brain, and produce death or insanity. So hot is it that were one to set his bare foot on a plank on which the sun shines, he would start as if it were hot iron, and the pitch boils out of the joints like oil. Having caught the desired south-easter, we stood away west with a fine steady breeze and smooth water, bowling along very pleasantly.

You will naturally think that it was rather a hazardous position for thirty-five men to occupy for so many weeks, at the mercy, you may suppose, of two hundred and ninety-four savages, who find themselves in a situation which certainly was not of their own choosing. It would, indeed, be dangerous were great precaution not taken to ensure safety. Before the slaves came aboard, a very strong wooden barricade is fixed across the deck, just before the mainmast, projecting over the sides, and twelve feet high, on the top of which sits two men with loaded

muskets all the time the slaves are on deck – from eight in the morning to four in the afternoon – while through a port on each side of the deck a cannon, loaded with grape, stands ready for use should a rising take place. Besides, a lot of the stoutest are chained together in pairs, by one leg and one arm; and all the males are kept forward of this barricade, on the main deck, whilst all the females are kept aft, on the quarter-deck, so that they have no intercourse whatever during the passage. All the crew – except the second mate and the boatswain – are also kept on the quarter-deck during the day, with an arm chest full of loaded muskets, pistols, and cutlasses, – so that the poor slaves would have no chance of success whatever in a rising. There is a small door through the barricade which is kept shut during the day. The whole of the main deck is grated, so as to ventilate the sleeping room. The men in irons sit on the edge of the hatchway, while all the rest lounge about. The lower-deck, where they sleep, is kept scrupulously clean, washed and scrubbed with sand twice a week, dried with fire-pans, and fumigated with vinegar and tobacco smoke; while large tubs, with close covers, are placed at proper distances for necessary purposes. Clothes they have none – in this climate they are not required for heat, and had they any, they would very soon have more company than would be desirable.

Every morning, at eight o'clock, they are all brought on deck, when, to every six of them is set down a wooden dish containing a sufficient quantity of boiled rice, beans, or Indian corn, as the case may be, mixed with palm oil, of which they are extremely fond, and with which they season all their victuals, – besides two gills of fresh water each. At four in the afternoon, they get a similar mess, and go below; but none are allowed on deck if it rains. They are bathed twice a-week in salt water. When one is taken ill, he is separated from the rest; the doctor attending him, and fresh soups and other comforts supplied to

him. The seamen hang their hammocks under the awning on deck; and I have seen, when it fell a heavy rain, the water dripping from the bottom of the hammocks.

We have heard much of the horrid cruelty exercised on the poor slaves during the middle passage. What may have been done by others I do not know, but as far as my experience has gone, I never saw an instance of it. On the contrary, I never saw anything in their treatment but what was kind and merciful; in fact, there is much more attention paid to the negroes during the passage, than to the crew. They get two substantial meals of fresh provision each day; if any one is taken ill, he is separated from the others, attended to by the doctor, a goat killed, and fresh soup and other good things given him; while the sailor never tastes anything fresh from one continent to the other, and should he be found snatching a handful of the slaves mess when dealing it out, he would be severely punished. The picture, however, like most others, has two sides. In a few weeks the sailor can change his master, and, at least, have a chance of bettering his condition; while the poor slave is captive for life, perhaps at the mercy of a tyrant, with no relief in prospect but the grave.

I must not omit to mention a very remarkable shoal of fish which we encountered during the passage, from which all hands, slaves and crew, were supplied with as much as we could consume for several days. The Dolphin, which paid us such an agreeable visit on this occasion, is the mackerel of the tropical sea, exactly of the same elegant shape and variety of colour, but the dolphin grows much larger than the mackerel, in some cases to twenty pounds weight; the colours much brighter and better defined, particularly when dying, at which time the blue, green, and gold of his lovely robe shine out in all their glory. Round the ship as far as the eye could reach, they were so closely packed as to have swimming room and no more, within a few inches of

the surface of the water, heading the same way, and going at the same rate as the ship, and from ten to twelve pounds weight each. Fancy yourself looking down on water, as clear as John Gullen's well, so literally swarming with fish rushing along at the rate of seven miles an hour, glowing with all the colours of the rainbow, in strong sun light, as if the sea, as far as the eye could command was asheet of beautiful stained glass, while at night it seemed a vast plain of fire from the close and rapid motion of the fish, and you may form some faint idea of the splendour of the scene. The oldest sailor on board had never met with anything of the kind to such an extent before. Soon every hook and line was in requisition, baiting with a bit of pork skin, when as many were caught every morning as served for the day. It was like the manna in the wilderness, and to me a very exciting spectacle.

One morning soon after the Dolphin had left us, we were surprised to see, a-head of us, a *lumpiness* in the water as if agitated by a gale of wind – the water of a brown muddy colour. It was coming down on our larboard bow; and as we were coming on it in an angular direction, it was not long till we ran into it. This strange hubbub of muddy water was caused by the discharge of that king of rivers, the mighty Amazon, or Maranon, which drains so many thousands of square miles of the immense continent of South America, and falls into the sea on the equator. Geographers tell us it is one hundred miles wide at its mouth, and upwards of thirty fathoms, or one hundred and eighty feet deep. No wonder though it agitates and discolours the ocean even at the place where we crossed it, some hundreds of miles from the land.

About this time it was discovered that our stock of fresh water – if fresh it could be called, when, after rotting in the cask, it was nearly as black as ink, and smelt shockingly bad – was nearly exhausted. The crew had certainly not made away with much of it, as we had neither tea nor coffee to infuse, and our

beef was boiled in salt water, so that not a spoonful came to us, except a few gills daily, served out with great strictness. The great source of consumption was the quantity required for the slaves' mess and the use of the cabin. In a climate like this, with nothing to eat but salt beef and hard biscuit, the scarcity of water is one of the greatest calamities to which anyone could be subjected. Bad as our allowance was, we drank it ravenously, and the prospect of soon losing even that, was very alarming. Often, in dreams, have I visited your father's garden, and imagined myself kneeling by John Gullen's well, where the pure crystal stream gushes up so copiously, and swallowing it so sweetly; and when I awoke with my tongue like a piece of dried fish, and at a distance of seven thousand miles from the sweet water, and found it all a delusion, the distress was almost unbearable.

After a run of the usual time, we made the land about seventy miles to the south of Demarera, and ran into a small river called Berbice— and what a blessed sight was the river— O! how precious was that muddy water, and how it was devoured. Owing to the tear and wear of our cables while on the African coast, they got so chafed that we lost every anchor we had, and sailed from Acra with the two twelve-pounder guns we got at Bimbey slung across each other as a substitute for an anchor. With this we anchored, took in some water, and got some necessaries from the town of Berbice, intending next morning to run to Demarera. At high water we weighed our temporary anchor, and got sail on the ship. Unfortunately, while so engaged, she dropped astern, and stuck on a sandbank, and continued beating till next day, by which time the rudder was knocked off and lost, and a part of the copper and sheathing torn from her bottom aft. Meantime, a boat was sent up to the town, a distance of several miles, and a new hawser, and strong kedge anchor procured, when we hove her into deep water, and got to

sea. Before doing so, however, it was necessary to construct a temporary rudder. This was effected by lashing together a few short lengths of an old cable, as much in form of a rudder as possible, which being fixed to the bolts of the sternpost on which the rudder used to hang, was wrought by tackle attached to it from the deadeyes of the mizzen rigging, and under each quarter. The weather was good and the wind fair, so we crept along the coast smoothly enough.

The distinguishing feature of this country is its uniform flatness, having, very evidently, at one time been a part of the ocean, above whose level it is only a very few feet elevated – a huge meadow, with a sea line of over a thousand miles, receding very far inland. It comprehends English, Dutch, and French Guiana, and has an unhappy celebrity for its pestilential and poisonous atmosphere; its huge, sluggish rivers, alive with the ravenous alligator; and its tangled forests with the with the no less abhorrent sixty-foot serpent, the boa constrictor; a country whose fertile soil – in spite of its deadly nature – has charmed away from their father's hearth so many thousands of British noble youths, some from choice, and many from necessity, to become the prey of its detestable clime; where land, air, and water are swarming with all imaginable kinds of monsters to torment them while they live, which in general is not long, and the land crab to polish their bones as clean as the drone of a bagpipe before they are a week in the grave.

While working down the coast, a long, low rakish-looking schooner was dodging about, working her way up, meeting us, shewing no colours, and we thought her a coasting trader, and took little notice of her. Whether she did not like the look of our guns, or that we were to near the harbour – for we were only a few miles from Demerera River, where two British gunbrigs and a cutter were at anchor, and that, had they taken us, they could not have carried us off – we did not know; but she stood

away out to sea towards a large ship which had just hove in sight in the offing, and was standing in for the harbour. By the time we entered the river, and were working up to George-Town, which stands a few miles up, on the south bank, our attention was turned to our old friend, the schooner, who fired a broadside into the coming ship, boarded her, and in a few minutes the pair were running for the River Oronoco, a Spanish settlement, a few hundred miles north from this port. It was not half-an-hour after the schooner had fired into the ship, till the gunbrig and cutter had anchors slipped, and every stitch of sail set, and passed us full speed in pursuit. we anchored abreast of the town, in the great, brown, lazy-looking Esiquibo River, and next day the gunbrig and cutter returned without the schooner or her prize – a large ship belonging to Bristol, with a full cargo of slaves – the *Privateer*, for such she proved to be, having got clear off. We learned afterwards that a squall had struck the brig and carried away her topmast; and the night proving dark, the thieves escaped.

In a short time the slaves were landed, and we again had the old Lady Neilson to ourselves. During the middle passage we were subjected to very great privation, through the scarcity and exceeding bad quality of both meat and drink. Whenever two of the crew got into conversation the invariable subject was, the great enjoyment they would have when they got into port. Alas! for human foresight and shadowy day dreams. How often do we find “grief and pain,” when we look for joy and pleasure.

“To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty space from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death.

Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

Those gross and sensual enjoyments to which these misguided men looked forward with so much eagerness, and which precept and example taught them to relish, are certainly "more honoured in the breach than the observance," and on the present occasion were never realised. The anticipation may no doubt have had a tendency to cheer their darkened minds, when everything within and without was painfully gloomy. but the "vision" was "baseless," and dissolved into "thin air." The scant and unwholesome food and rotten water which had been given us for so many weeks, aggravated no doubt by the pestilential nature of the climate, and sudden change to fresh provision, vegetables and fruit, brought down on the crew of our doomed ship a deadly pestilence, which, in a very short time, gave two-thirds of the ship's company a final discharge from all earthly care, and sent them beyond that bourne from which no traveller returns." A disease called putrid fever seized a number of them almost simultaneously. They were struck down with great sickness, the whole system swelled and became a mass of corruption, large tumours broke out all over the body, discharging a gross, reddish matter, and death soon did his work. As soon as the slaves left, the seamen went below to sleep, and in this distressing state of things I kept my hammock on deck, below the awning, so as to breathe as little of the tainted air as possible, and the "destroying angel" passed over me. My neighbour apprentice, John Clark, about eighteen years old, and very stout of his age, was one of these happy tempered people whom scarcely anything will annoy or dishearten. Neither toil

nor privation seemed to have any effect in disturbing his cheerful and benevolent nature. The hard fare to which he, like others, had been subjected for so long a time seemed to have not the smallest effect on either the mind or the body of the cheerful young sailor; and well and devotedly did he use his powers of mind and body in toiling day and night among his stricken shipmates. In his rambles through the ship – for everything was confused – he stumbled on a pipe of wine in the afterhold, which had got a little soured. Of this Clark made liberal use of every day and all the day long. The mosquitoes had stung his legs while asleep, til they shewed a mass of running sores, and were constantly discharging a great deal of thin, watery matter. This, together with the copious perspiration caused by the heat of the climate, the sour wine and persevering exertion, I believe, tended much to keep off the fatal plague. Be that as it may, he went through it all scatheless, and as all those who could get away from the doomed ship had fled for their lives, it soon happened that all who were left aboard were Clark, myself, and a stricken Italian sailor, in a state of raving insensibility – generally the last stage of the disease. We were ordered by the captain and doctor, who came aboard for a short time every day, to take the sick man to the wharf, where the hospital officials would take charge of him. Never shall I forget the imploring looks of those large black eyes, and the distracted cry for mercy of the poor fellow when we were attempting to put him into the boat. He took no notice of anything till his eye caught sight of the water, but the moment he did so – imagining, I saw, that we intended to drown him – his look and cry became heartrending. He grasped at everything near him, and it was not till after a severe struggle – poor Clark and I crying like children – that we got him into the boat, where, having lost sight of the water, he sank down quite insensible.

We were much relieved when we got the ship to ourselves;

but we were not long to hold possession. We had no sooner left Liverpool than a leak broke out, and from that time – excepting our short stay in the Camaroons River, till we arrived at Demarera, I am not sure if the pump stood idle one hour at a time – two men in each watch having to work it day and night. I told you of our hammering on the sandbank at Berbice, which, of course, did not mend the matter with the bottom of the old Lady Neilson, so that, when we arrived at Denarera, an inspection having been made, she was declared not seaworthy, and sold for the benefit of the insurance company. Clark and I being the only apprentices, were ordered aboard the ship Expedition of Liverpool, to work our passage to that port.

We will leave this region of disease and death with great pleasure, and much thankfulness for our preservation; and my next will be from Liverpool, if it is God's will to carry us once more across the great Atlantic.

The monsters I spoke of are legion, such “as were never dreamed of in our philosophy.” At night you are tormented with mosquitoes, a kind of overgrown midge, who keep buzzing about and fasten on whatever part of the skin is exposed, and sting sharply. You naturally scratch the spot, when, if you fret the skin, next morning you find a red spot of the size of a sixpence, which generally festers and discharges a watery matter for weeks, and leaves an ugly scar on the skin. The cockroach is another great nuisance. He is a great brown beetle, sometimes found two inches long, who keeps crawling and flying about in the dark, in all directions, and whatever part of clothing is touched by him, retains a most disgusting smell, which no washing will extract. I have often been struck on the face by them when they were flying in the dark, which caused considerable pain, their brown shell being as hard as your thumb nail.

During the day, the plague of flies, of all sizes, shapes and

colours, is almost unbearable. I can feel for poor Pharaoh and his friends when subjected to such punishment for their misdeeds; and I am not at all surprised at his promise to let the Israelites go, if relieved from the monstrous annoyance. One would promise almost anything in his circumstances. In this place the meat is no sooner on the table than it is absolutely covered in flies, and when we begin to eat, a great deal of caution is necessary to keep them out of our mouth. All whoop can afford it, have a black fellow or two stationed at table with large fans, driving away the tormentors. If you go into the wood, you are in danger from snakes, from one to sixty feet long – the boa constrictor, for instance. If you go into the river to bathe, a thirty-feet crocodile is on the outlook for you, to eke out his dinner. In short, go where one will, he meets with much to annoy him. Everything in the vegetable kingdom is grand and beautiful, however; the size and delightful variety of the floral tribes, and the gaudy plumage of the winged, are wonderfully grand and beautiful, and the trees magnificent. One great defect is the limited horizon; – the uniform flatness gives a sickly sameness that is very unpleasant, and you must take a journey of some hundreds of miles before you meet with an eminence higher than an ant's nest. We sail tomorrow. – I am, ever yours, S.R.



LETTER V

LIVERPOOL, *March*, 1801.

My last from Demerera informed you that I had shipped on board the Expedition, Captain Ward. She had sold her cargo of slaves in Demerera. loaded a cargo of sugar, rum and coffee for this port, and sailed a few days after the despatch of my letter. We stood away north and eastward with a steady breeze and fine weather; nothing worth recording taking place till we got among the leeward islands, through among which we had to grope our way for about a thousand miles. Captain Ward is an Irishman of very drunken habits, and a tyrannical and cruel old savage. The chief mate is also an Irishman; and were it not that he has to humour the old wretch, not a bad officer. One day while running along the coast of the Island of Martinique, all hands busy on deck,, the old skipper parading the quarter deck – drunk as usual – a very exciting occurrence took place. There had shipped at Demerera, to work his passage home as a landsman, a middle-aged man, of genteel appearance, evidently a man who had seen better days. He had been to Africa as Captain's Clerk, left his ship and joined us. He was also an Irishman. On the day mentioned he was sweeping the quarter deck, with a broom having a strong wooden shaft. It was quite evident he had not been bred a scavenger, as he certainly did not handle the broom on scientific principles; but he was obviously doing his best. I was close by knotting rope yarns, and noticed old Cerberus eyeing the gentleman – as the sweeper was called by the crew – for sometime with a scowl, which I knew meant mischief. At last he sprang at the gentleman with a dreadful oath, got a hold of the broom, and struck the poor fellow along the side of the head

with the shank, till he staggered several steps. Recovering himself he rushed at the skipper – who was a little wizened old sinner – clapped one arm round his neck, and the other under his thighs, and lifting him up, ran aft to the taffrail, and was in the act of pitching him overboard, which he assuredly would have done, had not the mate sprung and got hold of them. I do believe there would not have been many watery eyes though he had gone into Davy's locker. It was no joke, however, to see and hear how the old fellow exploded; between fear and anger he was foaming mad. The first word was a roar for his pistols to shoot the mutineer, while the said mutineer looked dissatisfied that he had not succeeded in making sharks meat of his tormentor. The mate, however, managed to compromise the matter by putting the gentleman in irons, to be taken home in that state, and hung for mutiny. He was kept confused for some time and liberated without further punishment.

One evening, a few days after the sweeping affair, when close in with the Island of St. Bartholomew, a heavy squall struck the ship, when all hands went to work to take in sail. On this duty three men and I were ordered to furl the mizzen top sail, that, to roll it up and fasten it round the yard. The weather having been fine, it never had been necessary to furl the sail since we left port; and when we had the sail rolled up, the yard arm gasket – a small rope for rolling round to fasten the sail to the yard – was gone. I was ordered down to get another, and was soon up again; but this detained us a few minutes longer than we would otherwise have been. Old Crabtree noticed this, but made no allowance for the extra time needed; but was standing at the mizzen shrouds, with a rope's end, to freshen our way as he termed it. We wore nothing but shirt and trousers in that climate, so that a two-inch rope across his soldiers was a sufficient argument to persuade a fellow to look sharper next time, when applied with all the force our old friend could exert. One

application of it was quite sufficient to persuade me, so I ran and jumped down onto the main deck, a height of five feet, and sprained one of my ankles very badly, which has given me occasional pain.

Nothing particular occurred to break the monotony of our every day routine, we were still holding on our course to the north-eastward, which soon brought us into what is called variable winds, that is, out of the trade wind which blows only from one quarter, which is the case for $23\frac{1}{2}$ degrees on each side of the Equator, outside of which it blows from various points according to circumstances. Every week now brought with it a very perceptible difference in the coldness of the weather, and as it was now the winter season, when approaching the banks of Newfoundland, the long, cold, dreary nights made us feel very uncomfortable; shoes, stockings, caps, and the warmest clothing we could muster were now the order of the day. Yet even, "with all appliances and means to boot," we felt much like the poor black fellow, who, on his first coming into a frosty atmosphere, being observed to shiver, and being asked what ailed him, replied, "something biting me, me no see him." To be transported in a few weeks from broiling under a perpendicular sun, towards which one dare not turn his face, to the region of frost and snow, with the sun "shorn of its beams," creeping along the horizon like an overgrown moon, and dipping into the cold, blue water, as if ashamed of its lost brilliancy, is a very cheerless affair. The fact, however, of every setting sun bringing us nearer to the land of the "heather and thistle so green," and the cheering hopes of finding all whom we hold dear on earth alive and well, has a wonderful effect in enabling us to hold up manfully under every privation.

Our old tyrant still continued to keep himself under the influence of rum and water, particularly the former liquid, with a countenance as dark as a thunder cloud. Woe befel the poor

fellow on whom he exploded, which was a very frequent occurrence. The cabin boy, who was constantly under his eye, was kept in a state of perfect misery – made a perfect copping-block of by the miserable old man; and to such a length did he carry his cruelty to this poor boy, that, not content with the personal punishment to which he subjected him throughout the day, he gave the officers of the watch at night orders to keep the lad all night on the maintop gallant crosstress, that is to say, at the top of the highest mast, where sleep is impossible and the cold insufferable. The boy was certainly kept there a short time for several nights; but, to the credit of the officer, not so long as he was ordered – long enough, however, to do his business. In a short time he was seized with brain fever, and continued to rave in a state of delirium till we arrived here, and died next day in the infirmary, without any investigation, although as clear a case of manslaughter, if not murder, as ever was committed. Truly, “the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.” Unfortunately for me, being the youngest, I was taken into the cabin to fill his place, and although, I must do him justice, he did not treat me with a tithe of the severity which he exercised on my predecessor, I had enough and to spare. I shall confine myself just to one instance of the cruel and irritable nature of the man. We made the land on the south-west of Ireland, after a tolerably fair passage for the season; ran up the channel in good time, and hove to off the bank of Liverpool for a pilot; we did so in the evening, and lay to all night. It was the old man’s custom to cause a kettle of fresh water to be boiled to brew his toddy, and one of salt water to bathe his feet, every night before going to bed. I got all things in order – a pail of water tempered to the right degree, a towel on the bunker behind me; went down on my marrow bones laving the water on the shrunken shanks of the grumbling old sinner, with all my skill, till he told me to stop. Unfortunately, I had not laid the towel so that I could reach it without rising to

my feet, which was the work of a moment, and dropped on my knees right in front of him. I had no sooner done so than he drew up his leg and struck me on the nose with the sole of his foot, sending me right over on my back like a spread eagle, accompanied with several very unwholesome wishes for the good of my immortal part. I gathered myself up as quickly as possible, and, with much more patience than the patriarch Job exercised on his adversity, I neither cursed my mother nor anybody else, but quietly and gently rubbed down the shins of the old gentleman, with the blood trickling from my nose; handed him the raw material out of which he compounded a strong dose of "enemy," which he so often "put into his mouth to steal away his brain," feeling thankful I was so soon to be out of the power of the tyrant.

Next morning a pilot came alongside, and by the providential care of the Great Author of our being, we entered the Mersey after an absence of about twelve months. My uncle was detained in Demarera for some time to settle affairs connected with the old Lady Neilson. As soon as Clark and I got ashore, we reported ourselves at the counting-house of our masters, Messrs Twemlow & M'Dowal, and were sent to work in one of their warehouses to knot yarns, spin spun yarn, &c., till the captain came home. Where I shall date my next letter from I don't know, but as long as I live you will hear from me wherever I am. — Yours always,

S.R.



LETTER VI

LONDON, *June*, 1801.

My masters having no ship ready when Captain Cowan came home from Demarera, he got one out of London, belonging to the firm of Throgmorton & Anderson, in the same trade, and I followed him soon after. I started on the heavy coach as an outside passenger, and the weather being very fine, I enjoyed the journey very much. I always have been a very poor feeder; and as an instance of the quantity of food I could subsist upon without inconvenience, I tell you truly, I travelled two days and two nights – the time occupied by the coach between Liverpool and London – on a jacket pocketful of bread and cheese. I had one and sixpence for pocket-money, and bought a few pennyworths of damsons during my journey, but not a farthing for meat or drink. As the coach never stopped, except a few minutes at stages to change horses, I got no sleep. When the coach stopped at Barnet, a few miles from London, I fell sound asleep for the time it stood, which was all the sleep I got during the whole journey. We arrived at the Swan with Two Necks Hotel, Ladlane, all well; and I was met by my uncle, and taken down to the Limehouse Graving Dock, where our ship was lying. She is called the Crescent of London, a very pretty little ship of 400 tons, and allowed to carry, by a Government Inspector's measurement, two hundred and seventy-two slaves.

A Graving dock is one which can only admit one vessel at a time. She is hauled in at high water; and when the tide ebbs she sits down on blocks of wood, and is steadied by shores of wood to keep her on her keel. When the water is out of the dock the gates are shut, and she remains there as long as is necessary

for the examination of her bottom, when the dock gates are opened and she is hauled into the river. As our ship was in the hands of the carpenters, and as they were there only during working hours, I was put aboard as ship-keeper, and the dock gate to the street was locked in the evening. There was I left, the only living creature on board – there might, perhaps, be a few rats – till six o'clock next morning. I got my grub on shore, but as I had not brought my hammock from Liverpool, and as the weather was warm, and the nights short, it was not considered necessary to provide bed-clothes till we went to sea, I made a virtue of necessity and rolled myself up in the ship's colours in a corner of the cabin, till roused by the carpenters next morning. You may well believe that for many nights at first I got scarcely any sleep; and you can enter fully into my feelings in this position, if you call to mind how very much excited you and I used to get in the winter evenings during our schoolboy days when listening to all manner of tales of ghosts, fairies and hobgoblins, "of all dimensions, shapes and mettles," at my grandfather's fireside; and how; when the time came when you had to go home, though not above fifty yards, we held one another by the hand till we reached exactly half way, what a desperate rush each of us made to get into our respective houses, "lest bogles catch us unawares." I believe that "habit is a second nature," and that from the case-hardening I am undergoing, I am getting clear of a certain portion of the enervating influence of those silly tales which we used to swallow with so much greediness; though I am very doubtful if ever I will be able to "pluck the old woman from my heart," entirely.

Since I came here I have come in contact with one of the greatest scoundrels I ever met with. He is an old man, a gardener, who lives in the neighbourhood, and, I am sorry to say, a Scotchman. I met him lounging about the dock gate, and finding I was Scotch he professed much friendship, asking all

manner of questions – among others, if my mother had given me a Bible along with me. I could see at once, by the sneering tone and manner of his asking the question, the nature of the man. When I answered in the affirmative, he showed the “cloven foot” more plainly by insinuating that, if I was to live to his age I would find out the great absurdity of all that sort of thing. I thank God I had firmness enough to disregard and despise the old infidel and his base insinuations; but I could not help wondering what motive he could have in endeavouring to unhinge my belief and confidence in the Book, and considering how deeply interested in the service of the devil he must be, in serving him for nought, by endeavouring to poison the mind of a mere child. He had generally a young fellow about eighteen along with him, a very seedy-looking customer, who sounded me on another tack – offering me sweet cakes, and coaxing me to plunder the ship, and he would dispose of it and divide the spoil. This, of course, I refused to do and gave up all correspondence with them.

In due time the ship was anchored in the river, and riggers set to work to put the rigging in order, and have other preparations made for going to sea. A very great revolution has taken place in the affairs of Europe within the last fifteen months – as you well know – from the newspapers read by my uncle to the whole village every Monday evening at the “parliament style” in the corner of his own garden. When fitting out the Lady Neilson, war and bloodshed was the order of the day. The enemy of peace and good order, the ruler of France, had collected an army and flotilla to put an end at once and for ever to England’s supremacy. Making a boast and carrying it out, however, are very different things. The noble old George the Third, the best king, take him all in all, who ever sat on the British throne – acting in accordance with the advice of able counsellors whose plans were nobly carried out by such heroes as Neilson,

Jarvis, Rodney, Duncan, and many other brave men, and which were finished up by Neilson's dash at Copenhagen this year – has convinced the scourge of God – Napoleon – that the nation of shopkeepers, as he sneeringly termed the English –

“Had hearts resolv'd, and hands prepar'd,

The blessings they enjoyed to guard.”

Last year, when shipping a crew in Liverpool, in consequence of the war, everything – anything with a jacket and trousers on it – was shipped at £6 a month, with rations; even landsmen at £3. Now, when peace has blessed the world once more, hundreds of first-class seamen, newly discharged from the navy, are to be got at the rate of £1 16s. a-month each; consequently we had no difficulty in securing thirty-six able seamen at that price. We sail in a few days; and if I live to see Cape Coast-Castle again, my next will be from that place. I ever remain, Your affectionate friend,

S.R.



LETTER VII.

Acra, West Coast of Africa, *Sept.* 1801.

Two days after the despatch of my last letter from London, our good ship *Crescent*, was put in charge of a pilot to take her down the river. A large boat had been in course of building for us, to be employed in trading when we reached Africa, but not being finished, her framework only being set up, and as much of her bottom planked as to allow her to float; and as she could not be got into the river till high water, I was ordered to take four men, and take her down to Gravesend, where the ship would wait for us. However, our voyage was shorter than we expected, as we fell in with the good ship *Crescent* “sitting” comfortably on a sandbank, a little below Greenwich. We got our boat – about fifteen tons burden, and to be finished by our own carpenter on the passage out – on board; the ship hove off the bank, and got down to the North Foreland, landed the pilot, and stood away down channel with a fair wind and a flowing sheet.

There are very many rivers in this world of ours, as regards width, depth, or length of run, compared with the Thames is a mere insignificant rivulet; but that narrow, muddy stream, whose banks are studded with palaces, and its surface, for a length of seventy miles, literally covered with vessels of all sizes, all rigs, and from every nation of the globe, swarming like a beehive; loaded with the produce of both art and nature of every clime; look at it in this light, and it may be safely affirmed, that it carries on its bosom more than the half of all the rivers of Europe put together.

On leaving the Downs, the watches were chosen, and

there being six boys, of whom I was the youngest one, two were appointed for each top, to take the duty of working the light sails and rigging, such as setting or taking in top-gallant sails, royals, sky-sails, and top-gallant studding sails, in addition to deck duty. The consequence was great rivalry as to which of us had our sail set or furled first and in the most approved style, — many little tiffs and bloody noses being the result, but not much harm done. While on this subject I may tell you of a very difficult task which devolved on my mate and me — one which seldom occurs, and which is as difficult and dangerous a position to be placed in as any on board of a ship. I think I told you of a piece of wood like a *pot lid* which is nailed on the top of the royal masthead, called the “truck,” which has a small sheave in it for hoisting signals. This sheave had got stiff and would not work, on the fore-mast head, to which I belonged. It was necessary, therefore, that the truck should be brought down to be set right. The royal mast is a pole about as thick as one’s leg at the bottom and arm at the top — a bare pole, without any rigging whatever, and about twelve feet high. Our business was to sling a hammer round our neck, *shin* up the top-gallant shrouds, then make the best of our way up the bare pole; when high enough to strike the truck, to hold on firmly with the legs and one arm, and strike up to loosen it: while all the time the ship was walking through the water at the rate of nine miles an hour, and rolling from side to side heavily, so that the mast-head was regularly swaying forty or fifty feet each way alternately. The nails were rusted, and by the time we got up, our strength was so much exhausted that a few feeble strokes was all we could give till our limbs became powerless, and there was nothing for it but to slide down to the cross-trees and rest while the other took a spell. However, we managed to take the truck down and fix it up again all right.

Nothing worthy of notice occurred till we took up our old anchorage opposite Cape Coast Castle, and made arrangements

for commencing our old fatiguing business of gathering a cargo. An opportunity occurred, however, of lightening our labours in this respect, by the captain entering into an agreement with an agent to finish the number of slaves wanted – when we immediately began to land the goods necessary for purchasing them. I mentioned in my former letter how difficult it is, generally, to land ship's boats on this coast, in consequence of the surf which sets in so heavily, and the thing is much more difficult when heavily loaded. In these circumstances, there was nothing for it but to employ canoes, as they draw little water, and are more lively on a heavy surf. Fortunately, too, the canoes on this part of the coast are large, and well adapted for landing goods. One of them will carry a puncheon of rum, or bale of goods, with room for twelve men to paddle and one to steer. As soon as the landing commenced, I was made supercargo, to go ashore with the canoe, and see the goods deposited in the store. I liked it very much. It was very exciting to be perched on a puncheon of rum, or a bale of goods, while twelve naked savages were driving the canoe along like a weaver's shuttle – keeping time with their paddles to a chant struck up by the steersman, in which, at intervals, all hands would join, in lovely weather – the great heat of the perpendicular sun, subdued by a delightful sea breeze – the whole affair had an exhilarating effect on the spirits that was very pleasing. On nearing the landing place, however, there were no more capers cut – all hands appeared anxious and watchful, keeping the canoe steady, waiting for one of those heavy waves which occur at intervals. On came this roaring billow, on the crest of which we were hurried along at the speed of a race-horse, and pitched high and dry on the white sandy beach. Not a moment was lost, all hands jumped out, took hold of the canoe and dragged her a few yards out of the high water mark, and all was safe. As you know, I never could swim. I confess that I felt considerably nervous on approaching the

shore for a day or two, as the idea of being capsized was anything but a joke in my circumstances; but I soon came to like the landing as the best of it. I had many days of it, landing two or three cargoes every day. When landed, I had to keep a sharp look-out that no thieving took place. And as there are no horses nor wheel carriages in this benighted country, it would have amused you very much had you seen your humble servant with his motley crew transporting our cargo for about two hundred yards to the store, some rolling the rum puncheons, others carrying parcels of different kinds of goods. It was arranged, as soon as the goods were landed, we were to beat up to the windward to the Grain Coast – Cape Palmas, Cape Sahoo, &c., to purchase rice and maize for provision during the middle passage. Along this dreary coast we kept ranging for weeks, letting go and weighing anchor several times a day – the canoes being small, and lying a good distance from the shore, making the whole affair a very fatiguing and unpleasant thing.

As soon as a sufficient quantity was secured, we ran down to Cape Coast, flattering ourselves that, as the rainy season was drawing near, we had nothing to do but to ship the slaves and get away from the pestilential influence of this most disastrous season. Mark our exceeding disappointment when we were told that our agent had died a few days after we went to windward, and not a single slave was forthcoming. Every one was taken aback by these sad news. Nothing for it now but to re-ship the goods and remain for months in the season of rain and tornado, ranging along a rocky shore of many hundred miles in extent. without a single port of shelter to flee to. It was subjecting us to a worse phase of slavery than the poor creatures we were about to carry away. Necessity never had a law; the goods had to be re-shipped, and this was a much more difficult operation than the landing. It is quite a different thing to ride ashore on the top of a heavy sea and land on a firm sandy beach, from launching a

loaded canoe in the face of that sea, and taking her safe into smooth water. To accomplish this, the process has to be reversed. The canoe is loaded as near the high-water line as possible, a strong party are employed, and the lowest wave is watched; as soon as it breaks on the shore, the canoe is run into it by sheer force, and every paddle set to work with all vigour. By the time the low seas have exhausted themselves, the canoe is nearly out of the heavy seas; and during its progress over them it is several times elevated and depressed almost to the perpendicular; – pretty trying to the nerves of one who could not swim.

Nothing for us now but to work our weary way back to Cape Palmas, and commence cruising up and down, keeping a sharp out-look for a fire on shore, that being the signal that trade can be made. No sooner at anchor than we were surrounded with canoes; but, though there be a large fleet, there may not be above from one to four or five slaves; some may have fruits or yams, and some a few ounces of gold dust; besides, there are constantly a number of ships of different nations going over the same ground, necessarily making the purchase of the number wanted a tedious and disagreeable piece of work. I told you that we had not to go ashore to purchase the slaves, the traders – chiefs of the tribes – bringing them off themselves. The poor creatures generally seemed miserable and dejected, naked as when they first saw the light; many of them having been marched hundreds of miles to the coast, and not knowing what their ultimate fate was to be. Such is their ignorance in this matter, that I have often been asked by sign and gesture if they were to be eaten, and when I shewed signs of disgust and abhorrence, they seemed quite delighted. Some individuals among them certainly do seem sorrowful and dejected throughout, but those are the exception. The rule is, that in a few days, when they find themselves kindly treated and well fed, they appear contented and even cheerful. I witnessed one determined instance of what is called “taking

the sulks," in a tall, slender, young man who was purchased at Cape Coast, and who – as far as could be ascertained by inquiry afterward- was of high caste, and came from the interior. He was among our earliest purchases, and seemed very dejected, still maintaining a haughty bearing, and determined independence. When sent below he set himself down with his back against the ship's side, shut his eyes, folded his arms across his breast, and sat rigid as a bronze statue. Next morning he was found in the same position, and it was considered best not to take any notice of him farther than to set beside him his allowance of boiled rice, and some fresh water, expecting that hunger would overcome his stubbornness. It was of no use; there he was in the same position, and when urged to eat, he neither opened his eyes nor moved a muscle all that day and night, and at breakfast time next morning he was breathing certainly, but without any other sign of animation; meat and drink were kept always beside him. A few smart applications of the "cat" across his shoulders, still of no use; he never winced, nor did his eyelids give the slightest quiver. He continued several days in the same stubborn state, and I believe would have died so, when the captain set him ashore, free. The poor fellow had to be carried to the canoe, and of his future fate I never knew anything. I have seen several others have temporary fits of "sulks," but never to the same extent. As I said before, cheerfulness is the rule, and the "sulks" the exception.

In our schoolboy days we have read and heard tales of horrid cruelty exercised towards the poor slaves, both during the middle passage and in the West Indies; and the English language exhausted of its most vituperative terms in order to paint the character of the perpetrators in the darkest colours and most repulsive sense; and if such tales are true, the censure is well bestowed. There is little doubt that harsh and even cruel treatment may have been exercised towards the poor creatures

in both positions, according as they chanced to fall under the control of cruel or of merciful dispositions. Every subordinate, even in Britain – the only blessed spot of earth where true freedom is enjoyed – is subjected to the same annoyance to a greater or less extent, according to the temper of those under whose control he may happen to be placed. But in the case of West India slavery, were there no other motive than pure selfishness, it is at all probable that any person would purchase an article for which he have to hand over from thirty to one hundred pounds – the sums between which the price of a slave has ranged for sometime – and would starve, maltreat, or hammer the life out of a victim “who is his money,” as the Jewish lawyer expressed it? I think not. Consequently, allowing the owner to have no higher motive than self-interest, it would lean him to the side of mercy. There was one chance of freedom available to the Jewish slave which the slave of the Christian is denied. If the Jew in the punishment of his slave should hit rather hard and knock an eye or a few teeth out of the head of his man, the slave could claim his freedom. If the treatment issued in the death of the slave – if he lived till the sun went down – no punishment was inflicted on the master – the slave “was his money.” A selfish disposition is certainly a mean and detestable one, yet some good comes out of it to the poor slave; it prompts his master to feed and protect him, as the slave’s death would tell on his breeches’ pocket. But, with opinions, sayings, or doings of others I have nothing whatever to do. I am the advocate of no system. My intention when I commenced these letters was, and still continues to be, to give you “a plain, unvarnished tale” – a true statement of what was brought under observation. I will assert the truth or falsehood of nothing upon hearsay evidence, but as near as I can, be guided by the poet’s rule,

“Naught to extenuate, or aught set down in malice.”

We have been knocking about along this dreary coast for many months, including the rainy season, during which time a dry clear day was almost a miracle, and it is during this season that those dreadful visitations called “tornadoes” are frequent. A tornado is a combination of the elements of wind, rain, lightning, and thunder, and all of the first class. The coast, from Cape Palmas down to the Bight of Biafra – a distance of about four hundred miles, due east and west – is the principal trading ground of most British merchants, quite under their control, as far as trade is concerned; and, as you will see by a glance at the map of Africa, it is the ground over which we been so long and so laboriously traversing. Although the tornado cloud is not universally and absolutely fixed to one point in its formation or progress, yet the greatest number of those I have seen all began to form leeward, that is in the eastern quarter. When “a cloud like a man’s hand” shews itself there, it is time to look out for squalls. The cloud gathers very quickly, and advances along the coast in a westerly direction at hurricane speed, which I believe, is about one hundred miles an hour, and certainly it soon assumes a terrific appearance. During its progress, every breath of wind from every other quarter dies away. On it comes, “dark as was chaos ere the infant sun was rolled together, or had tried its beams athwart the gloom profound.” It lashes the surface of the sea into white foam, blowing so strong as to prevent the waves from rising; the water smooth as a milk basin, and of the same colour; the rain rushes down, every drop literally as large as a gooseberry; while at very short intervals a burst of fire seems to transform the dark mass into a sheet of flame, sometimes assuming the form of a gigantic tree, whose trunk and branches are alternately of blue and silver stained glass. In a common gale of wind there are lulls, and bursts of fury; but the tornado pitches its own key, and keeps it up. It is a monotonous roar at the highest pitch of the elemental scale; and when the thunder strikes

in – which makes the very deck under the feet shiver again – a combined sound is emitted of the most appalling character. To give or receive orders during this turmoil, is out of the question. Indeed, the whole affair is so awful and judgement-like, that it requires much nerve to look it firmly in the face; but when that can be done, it is terribly grand and sublime; and

“As it drifts along its path,
There is silence deep as death,
And the boldest holds his breath
For a time.”

During this elemental strife, if the ship is at anchor, an additional one is let go to prevent her from drifting; if under weigh every stitch of canvas is furled, and the ship put right stern on to meet the gale, and let her run right before it under bare poles, till the cloud passes over. Yet this device will not always succeed in dodging the enemy. The tornado sometimes varies his mode of attack – at one time raging right a-head, at another assuming the circular motion of the whirlwind, as if blowing from every point of the compass at once, which is its most dangerous and annoying phase. It has two good qualities, however – it purifies the atmosphere, of pestilential vapours, and does its work very quickly. We lost a fine schooner boat, with a noble old sailor and two black fellows, in one of these squalls. And while at anchor in Cape Coast Roads a ship riding at a short distance from us was struck with lightning, by which her mainmast was shattered, and a sailor boy killed who happened to be at the masthead at the time.

During our visit to Cape Lahoo, a station on the windward coast, we had an adventure which was nearly productive of serious consequences. There is a small river at the place, though not navigable for ships. There is a large native town on each side of the river, each having a king or chief. When we arrived, the parties were engaged in war to the knife, which had

been raging for some time. There was a Dutch ship trading with one of the kings, and we naturally went to work with the other. A rivalry soon got amongst all concerned, and many amusing occurrences took place. Unfortunately for us, one of the chiefs who traded with us turned out to be a determined and accomplished swindler, who, by insinuating himself into the good opinion of the captain, obtained from time to time a considerable quantity of trade goods, under the pretence that he had lots of slaves on their way from the interior, whom he daily expected, and whom the skipper wished to secure. He came aboard daily in great state, with two or three canoes, never failing to cajole the captain out of something, protesting that he expected his victims hourly. An amusing affair took place one day by the trader persuading the skipper to fire a gun into the forces of the other party, who were gathered in vast numbers on the beach, flourishing their muskets and war knives, and cutting all manner of capers – being about to ford the river and attack our friends on the other side. We lay about three-quarters of a mile from the land, and while in the midst of their bouncing and bravado, one of our 12-pounders was loaded with round shot, and fired right at them. No magician's rod ever laid a spirit more quickly, or more effectually than that single shot did the warriors. It struck the water near the land, then the beach, raising a cloud of sand; and away into the wood, they dispersed so quickly, I could scarce help believing they had sunk into the sand. We never saw them again. They managed, however, to set fire to the town belonging to our friends, some days after, as we saw it burning for many days. Had the affair ended here not much harm would have been done, but the captain becoming convinced the black rascal was robbing and making a fool of him, he checkmated him effectually at last. The method he adopted, however, being a breach of the rule and law of the trade – which expressly forbids kidnapping in any case – a great deal of expense and trouble

arose out of it. The swindling chief convinced that his villainy was still unperceived, came on board one day in full feather, with his three canoes and eight stout fellows – his usual bodyguard – and extremely anxious for more goods to pay for the slaves which he protested were now quite at hand. He found out this time, however, that he had come once too often; the trap was set for him and he was caught. The captain received him with his usual civility. One man was left in each canoe, while all the rest came on deck with their master; he was conducted into the cabin as usual to have his glass of grog, but to his great mortification, the armourer was waiting for him, and clap't him fast in irons. No sooner did his men hear the scuffle than they ran to the taffrail, and plunged headlong into the water, got into their canoes and off like lightening; but no harm was intended towards them. Next day we got under weigh and stood away for Cape Coast, distance about two hundred miles – the Captain imagining that means would be used by friends of the captive chief to pay for the goods which he had fraudulently obtained, if not, he would carry him off as a slave. The skipper's iniquity found him out, however, sooner than he calculated upon. The day after we sailed from Cape Lahoo, a Liverpool ship anchored there, and the captain going ashore to see about a supply of water, was surrounded by a whole fleet of canoes, and compelled to pledge himself to use means for the return of our prisoners immediately. Accordingly, he followed us down at once, made application to Governor Dalziel, then in command of the castle, when our captive had to be released, and my uncle obliged to pay the piper.

It would be quite uninteresting to follow us in all our dreary wanderings up and down this inhospitable coast, during the weary eight months to which our cruising in search of cargo extended. What made our case still more deplorable, was the fact that the rainy season was included on that space of time;

ands also the period when those dreadful visitations called tornadoes, which I have already attempted to describe, are most prevalent. One can scarcely imagine anything more dreary and uncomfortable than our position during that almost incessant downpour for the space of three months: a heavy, leaden atmosphere shutting out the sun; long sickly calms for days, even for weeks; the surface of the sea lashed into a mass of foam and air bubbles by the extraordinary size of the warm raindrops; and a good thing it was that it was warm: had it been cold and as interminable as it was, not a man of us would have lived for a week. In these circumstances, an occasional tornado, appalling as it was, appalling as it is, is a merciful visitation, as it purges the venom out of a nursery of disease like this, rendering the air breathable, without inhaling death at every inspiration.

It was during one of our visits to the windward coast that the effects of Captain Ward's cruelty, which was the cause of spraining my ankle during our passage home from Demerara – mentioned in a former letter – became serious. Ever since that I occasionally felt sharp twitching pains pass through the joint; now it began to swell, and the pain became excessive. I was struck down for many weeks, the greater part of the time quite unconscious: an abscess formed, and the doctor had been cutting and carving away at it for some time before I was aware of it. When the fever left and I had become aware that I still existed, I found myself completely prostrated, a living skeleton, and just about as helpless as an infant – my spirits not much cheered, nor my hopes of life strengthened, by the passing remarks of my shipmates; though, I must do them the justice to say, I had the sympathy and good wishes of every one of them. But one above them all, dear Richard Hopkins, whose name and memory shall be ever dear to me, clung to me upon all occasions with the love of many brothers. Had I need to be lifted out of my hammock, which it required two people to do – for, although

I was reduced to skin and bone, the pain of the ankle was so excessive, when moved, it was necessary for one person to take my arms, while another supported my leg in the bight of a handkerchief, keeping it level with the body; had it hung for an instant I would have fainted; – of those kind hearted assistants, Hopkins was always one. Or if he had to go with a boat for a time, he never left without securing one to attend me in his absence; night or day made no difference. If he heard my feeble voice asking for a mouthful of water there he was in an instant to supply me. I have not had so much experience in life as to be a judge whether a blood-relation or a casual acquaintance oftenest proves the best and truest friend in time of need but in my hour of need I found the difference between the relation and the friend, when I contrasted the conduct of my mother's brother with that of the noble Richard Hopkins, as the following incident will show. During my illness, the doctor procured a basin of tea or soup, with a little soft bread, for me, which the steward brought from the cabin. It was a great boon for me when the sickness left me, and no doubt was instrumental in saving my life; and as I gathered strength I naturally found my appetite improving. On the steward asking me one day if I had enough, I simply told him I could eat more now, as I was getting better. What report he carried back I do not know. Perhaps the villain lied to my uncle, and turned my statement into a complaint. Be that as it may, in a short time I was surprised by seeing the captain coming forward to where my hammock hung, below the boom, on the main deck, above the hatchway. I was reading a book that the doctor had lent me, and kept my eyes fixed on it, while he kept walking fore and aft several times without speaking, eyeing me keenly as he passed; it was the first time he had seen me since I was struck down. At last he stood up, seemingly without any friendly intention, as he never made the slightest allusion to my illness, nor asked anything about my condition, but with all the

sternness he could assume, said "So you are complaining of your allowance are you?" I answered quietly, "No, sir; I made no complaint." "You lie, sir," he shouted in a passion, "and from this time you get nothing from the cabin; you shall go back to your mess;" that is to say, to a pound of beef that had lain for years in salt brine each day, and six pounds of mouldy biscuit in seven days – not very suitable sustenance for an invalid. So much for once did the stranger Samaritan, Richard Hopkins, triumph over the blood relation, Captain C --.

Independent altogether of how this sad visitation may affect my personal comfort or future prospects in life – over both of which it will necessarily exercise a very serious control – my heart bleeds when I think of the inexpressible sorrow and sinking of heart which the news of my condition will cause to my dear and kind-hearted parents. My dear mother! – Many are the bitter tears she will shed for the misfortune of her sailor boy; for whose welfare so many fervent aspirations have gone forth of her pious heart. Tell her, my dear friend, not to distress herself too much on my account, I am still in life and gathering strength; and although my lameness will, in all probability, unfit me from following up the profession I have chosen, and to which I looked forward with such high hopes and glorious aspirations – for the use of the ankle joint is quite gone – I have no doubt, that if we could see my case in all its bearings and ultimate consequences, my seeming misfortune is really and truly "a blessing in disguise." Besides, the short experience I have had of a sailor's life, has very considerably modified the opinion I had formed of it. The ocean paradise which loomed so brightly in my imagination, now appears considerably shorn of its beams. The brutal tyranny exercised by the officers, the deficiency and beggarly quality of the food and water, the isolation from everything like moral or religious training or good example, all tend to lower the fabled happiness of a sailor's life in the estimation of one who

has had a little experience, and looks at it in a calm and sober sense. And in the darkest shade of all, perhaps the position of the Old Salt who may have struggled on for twenty or thirty years, in spite of the battle, storm, and daily privation to which he may have been exposed; with short intervals of brutal indulgence while recklessly throwing away his hard earned wages with insane prodigality, – a moral wreck without a real friend to cheer, or a home to shelter him! This view of the matter – and it is not a mere fanciful one – will serve to moderate my regret should it prove necessary for me to retire from the calling I so ardently looked forward to as the business of my life. All things considered, then, perhaps I had better take the poet's advice –

“Hope humbly then, with trembling pinions soar!
Wait the great teacher Death, and God adore.
What future bliss he gives not thee to know,
But gives that hope to be thy passing now.
Hope springs eternal in the human breast!
Man never *is*, but always *to be*, bless'd.
The soul, uneasy, and confin'd from home,
Rests and expatiates on a life to come.”

In a few days we are to start on a run down to Acra where is a small fortress and garrison, the same place we sailed from last voyage. With the exception of the Island of Bimby and the entrance of the Cameroons River, Acra is the most beautiful station on all this coast that I have seen. Looking from the sea, it is the only place where anything like a green field is visible. Some pains have been taken here to thin the trees, to produce something like a nobleman's park in England, patches of green field peeping out of the intervals, while everywhere else that I have been on the whole coast, is an interminable mass of green forest. This uniform mantle of green which everywhere meets the eye, is very agreeably relieved by a sprinkling of the tall fishing rod-looking stem of the cocoa-nut tree towering on

every eminence far above all others, with its beautiful umbrella crown of feathery branches, a lovely object.

I understand we are to have a young chief as a passenger to London, to receive a first-class education. This looks well for the future of Acra. My next will be from the West Indies, if I live to reach it. – Ever yours, S.R.



LETTER VIII

Kingston, Jamaica, 1803.

Having obtained our lawful number of slaves – laid in as much fresh water, fire-wood, sheep, goats, young pigs, and poultry for the use of the cabin and sick slaves, as we had stowage for, – we weighed from Acra and stood away to the southward, to cross the equator for the purpose of catching the south-east trade wind to carry us across to the West Indies. In the neighbourhood of the line, we were annoyed with baffling light winds and dead calms, as if the elements had gone to sleep, the sun doing all the work – and doing it to a good purpose, enough to broil the brain in the head – till we reached the third degree of south latitude, when we caught the desired breeze, before which we stood away to the westward for the West Indies. Our voyage hitherto had been a very unfortunate affair – the time lost by the death of the agent, the landing and reshipping the goods, and the rivalry from the great demand for slaves rendering the procuring a cargo a very tedious business; and to render it more disastrous, small pox broke out soon after we sailed from Acra, which is always a deadly disease in a hot climate, aggravated in our case by want of room to keep the parties separate, although all was done that could possibly be done for their comfort in the circumstances. Flux also became prevalent, carrying off numbers; several of the crew also suffered much from this disorder, caused, no doubt, by the execrable quality of the food and water in such a climate. One thing we certainly had cause to be thankful for. Although we were eight months cruising along that pestilential coast – including

the three months of the rainy season – we did not lose a single white man by sickness. This great blessing was, under God, mainly attributable to our never having been in a harbour, scarcely ever less than two miles from land, except in a boat, consequently escaping the danger of exposure to night dews, which fall so heavily, and fever arising from the poisonous gases thrown off by decaying vegetable substances under the influence of a vertical sun. I may give you an instance of the danger of exposure to night dews that occurred to myself a few days before we sailed from Acra. I told you that on this coast like most others within the tropics, the sea-breeze generally dies away at sun-down, when a light, cool landwind sets off the shore, which extends two or three miles sea-ward, till sunrise next morning; and so copious are the dews that the land-wind is charged with them like mist. One lovely night, soon after sun-down, the full moon was just showing above the tops of the lofty trees, her orb apparently much larger than in the northern hemisphere, shining so bright that the dark shades on its surface – the shadow of the poor man who was guilty of gathering sticks on Sunday, you know – were scarcely visible, with everything as quiet and silent as the grave. The whole thing was so bewitching that I could not resist the temptation of getting up into one of the boats which had been hoisted on to the booms to be out of the way during the passage, and where I might be out of the way of interruption. Here I foolishly lay down without any covering from the dew, to gaze on the glorious scene with wonder and delight. While thus entranced I fell asleep, and continued so till roused by the boatswain calling the watch at twelve o'clock; when I found I had acted very wrong – indeed, there is no doubt that, if I had not been roused by the calling of the watch, my temerity would have cost me my life. As it was, I found myself drenched with dew; my body and limbs chilled with cold; while my head felt as if on fire, and my eyes swollen

and bloodshot from gazing on the bright moon. Several days of fever was the consequence, which it required all the doctor's skill to free me from. So much for disregarding the laws of nature.

I mentioned that flux attacked several of the crew, as well as the slaves. Among the number, Mark Louther, our boat-swain, a very fine fellow, and the stoutest man on board, was seized and carried off in a few days. A funeral on board of a ship, like all other funerals, is a very impressive thing. As soon as he dies the sailor is sewed firmly up in his hammock, into the foot end of which are placed a few cannon balls so as to make sure of sinking. The hammock is then placed on a grating – that is, one of the loose covers of the hatchway – four men, his old messmates, lift the grating and place one end of it on the bulwark rail, while they hold the other end, being the head, up at the same level, the corpse being covered with the British ensign, as a mortcloth. The burial service of the Church of England is then read, all standing uncovered. When that part of the service is arrived at where the body is consigned to the earth, the men elevate the end of the grating, and hammock and contents slip into the great deep. I also was ill with flux; and as I was weak from my confinement and suffering, I was quite sure that unless I could get it checked at once, I must soon become its victim. Common remedies were resorted to, but to no good purpose. During my former illness the doctor sometimes gave me an opium pill to procure sleep. On these occasions I always found that the pill made me costive. Recollecting this when seized with flux, I begged of the doctor to give me an opium pill, but he refused positively to do so, assuring me it would certainly kill me. But having made up my mind to a dead certainty, if the disease was not immediately checked, perceiving my weak state I could not hope to be saved by the common remedies, I gave him no rest till he gave me one, assuring me, that as it would

certainly kill me my blood was on my own head. I swallowed it without hesitation, and got quite quit of the disease before morning, but I had sickness and headache for some time.

When fairly under the influence of the south-east trade wind we made good progress westward, very few days passing without having to consign to the deep one or more bodies of the departed spirits of former bondsmen, but now fully emancipated from all earthly bondage by those agents of the grim king, flux and small pox. One thing I must bear witness to, everything – medical assistance, cleanliness, fresh nourishing diet, and general consideration of their wants – was certainly attended to, as far as circumstances would permit.

In crossing the track of vessels to the Cape of Good Hope and India, we fell in with the Dutch man-of-war brig *Arand*, Captain Jago, from the *Texel* for the Cape, from whom we got some cheese, hams, and sugar, none of which reached the forecastle. Both times that I have run the middle passage, we have had the most delightful weather I ever saw anywhere; the sky very generally covered with a thin white fleecy cloud, exactly resembling the web which covers the entrails of a sheep, which subdued the fiery blaze of the sun, with a steady breeze of fair wind, with slight variations; and when once fairly clear of the land, few calms, few squalls, and very little rain. This tended much to ameliorate the very great privation to which we were subjected from the bad quality and stinted quantity of food and water. Weeks passed away in this monotonous way, nothing to be seen but sea and sky, except a stray Mother Carey's chicken careering along in his ceaseless flight on weary wing, or a flock of flying fish skimming away to escape the devouring jaws of a pursuing enemy; but far above all other comparatively insignificant things – the glorious sun blazing up out of the mighty deep, and sinking into it as if to be for ever extinguished. These are sights sufficient almost to counterbalance any amount of priva-

tion; and most assuredly never to be forgotten. Early one morning we were surprised to observe a strange commotion and great discolourment of the water a short distance a-head, into which we were running in an angular direction; the muddy stream, for stream it certainly was, flowing due east, while our course was north-west by west. We kept tumbling away in the short snap of sea, caused by the stream running almost right in the wind's eye, till next morning, when we had our old calm water again. This hubbub was caused by the discharge of the water from the king of rivers, the mighty Amazon, that drains so many thousand square miles of the South American continent. It enters the sea on the equator, 100 miles wide, and 33 fathoms deep where it debouches. It must have a mighty power to preserve a river form for so many hundred miles from land as where we crossed it.

Shortly afterwards we witnessed a singular spectacle – a vast shoal of fish of considerable size, perhaps thirty pounds weight, all heading in one direction. Some of the old seamen had seen similar shoals before – the chase, as they called it, or hound and hare; certainly no similitude could be more appropriate, as the resemblance to a pack of ten thousand hounds at full speed in one direction was perfect, with the difference that the hound would run, while the fish leaped. They crossed our bows a considerable way ahead, in an easterly direction. We guessed the shoal to be a full mile in length, and somewhat more than that in breadth. Their number must have been enormous. They rose about three feet above the water, making a long leap, and rushed on at a furious speed. I do not exaggerate when I say that thousands were under the eye at once.

A rumour was afloat before we left Acra, that war had again broken out between England and France; and as we were unarmed, we were by no means anxious to meet a sail of any kind, lest she might be an enemy. Shortly before we made

Barbadoes, where we were ordered to call for instructions where to go with the slaves, we fell in with a brig standing in for the South American coast. On boarding, she proved to be French, and had left Senegal on the windward coast of Africa about the same time we started from Acra; and on being questioned if they had heard anything of war with England, they positively denied all knowledge of it, and seemed very glad to get clear of us. Had we been sure of the state of matters we could easily have taken the brig which would have made our long voyage a prosperous one for all concerned. On the second morning after overhauling the brig while standing down on Barbadoes, early in the morning a small suspicious-looking schooner was seen dodging down on our starboard bow, evidently wishing to overhaul us. Suspecting from the war report that she was a French privateer, we began to feel very uncomfortable, but owing to the crowded state of the ship, and the absence of arms and ammunition, all we had for it was to set every sail that would draw, and stand on our course. By and by, the chase dropped into our wake and stood after us, firing a gun now and then without striking us; and as she was coming up hand over hand we hove to, a boat came alongside, when it turned out the schooner was a British privateer, four days from Barbadoes, looking out for French merchantmen. We sent her in chase of the brig we let slip through our fingers, and stood on our course.

According to our reckoning, we expected to make the land about Carlisle bay next morning; and as soon as night came on we shortened sail and stood on under foresail and close-reefed top-sails, the wind right a-stern. With all our caution, however, we narrowly escaped shipwreck, with the inevitable loss of every soul on board. The island of Barbadoes is low; and although an out-look was kept, the land was taken for a cloud on the horizon. Providentially, but by what was looked upon as a mere accident, the boatswain – whose watch was below at the

time – had occasion to go to the head, when he sang out instantly, “Down with the helm – breakers under the bows.” This notice was not a moment too soon. All hands were on deck in an instant, and the ship brought up sharp in the wind just in time, for when she began to gather way ahead, one could have pitched a biscuit on to the rocks, where the sea was breaking half as high as the top of the mast. The outlook had for some time observed a dark object in the distance, but mistook it for a cloud. I do not believe in the boatswain’s discovery being *accidental*; I understood it to be a decided interposition of divine Providence to preserve the lives of over three hundred human beings, who, had we run on for other five minutes, would have been “where the wicked cease from troubling.” The sun rose about the time we got an offing, and by mid-day we were safe at anchor in the lively Carlisle Bay in the Island of Barbadoes, surrounded by boats and canoes loaded with all manner of goods, vegetables, fruit, &c. A sufficient supply of vegetables and fresh meat was soon served out, and no language that I am acquainted with can at all describe the luxury of this feast, no one can even *feel* it till he has been for many weeks under a vertical sun fed on salt junk and mouldy biscuits, and blue stinking water to drink; and even a short allowance of all that. To have fresh meat, with an unlimited supply of sweet wholesome water, was a turn of fortune we durst hardly dream of.

Our instructions were to try Port Royal, in the Island of St. Vincent, and if no demand was met with there, to run down to Kingston, Jamaica. The news of the renewal of the war with France being confirmed, there was in consequence a hot press wherever a king’s ship was met with. All the old man-of-war men on board took the alarm, having no desire again to enter the service. Hear[ing] that the Tartar frigate was at Port Royal, Jamaica, they came to the determination to go ashore, and take their chance of a ship home from Barbadoes, rather than enter

Port Royal with the certainty of being pressed. Having got a supply of water and other necessities to take us down to Kingston—a run of about ten days—the order was given to weigh anchor. The crew having managed to smuggle some rum aboard, and the most of them being “half-seas over,” and under the determination of keeping as long as possible clear of their “uncle,” as they called the king’s service—to a man refused to go with the ship any farther; and although they had about eighteen months pay due to them, they walked into a shore boat and left everything belonging to them, as the captain would not allow them to take even their hammocks. This was a bad affair for all concerned, the crew having upwards of thirty pounds due to each of them, with the loss of everything except what they stood in, while we who were left behind were placed in a very unenviable position. Nine individuals, consisting of captain, two mates, doctor, armourer, cook, steward, and two boys of whom I was one, to navigate a ship for upwards of 1500 miles, having a complement of 270 slaves, was a task as desperate and hopeless as can well be imagined. One thing was in our favour—and it was a very essential thing—the wind was fair, and at this season we were not liable to be annoyed by squalls or heavy rains; and as the men-slaves could not see the quarter deck by reason of the high barricade I spoke of, they could not know how weak-handed we were, so as to induce them to attempt mutiny, as, had they been aware of our condition, they very likely would have done. Hands being hired from the shore to purchase the anchor, and get the sail on the ship, we started on our very foolhardy enterprise. As there were only the officers and the other boy and I who could steer the ship, and as my ankle was still weak, I was placed on a chair, with a stout slave at the lee side of the wheel to turn as I ordered him, while all hands were thus free for other duty—the officers taking spell and spell all night. Our first destination was Kingston, St. Vincents, a

distance of about three hundred miles. We ran through a narrow channel between St. Vincents and a small island called Baguan, through which a strong current sets to leeward; and as the port of Kingston lies behind an abrupt headland in this channel, we ran so far as leeward as to make it utterly hopeless for us, in our short-handed state, to beat against wind and tide to regain the harbour, so we held on our course for Port Royal, Jamaica. I told you that when my dear friend Hopkins left us, he gave me in charge to his old shipmate, Daniel Gray, who did all he could to make me comfortable; but as I was now able to stir about a bit I did not require much attention. However, when the poor fellow left us in Barbadoes, he gave me his chest and hammock, with a pretty young parrot. Guess my vexation when, a few days after we passed St Vincents, while my black friend and I were at our post at the wheel, I saw my beautiful bird flying away to leeward, and lighting on the blue water, from which it would never rise anymore. So much for my day dreams, in which I saw my dear mother cherishing my parrot for the sake of her sailor boy, who was "far away on the billow," should I be still able to follow my profession. Alas for our visionary castle-building! No wonder though it be altogether vain, and end in disappointment,

"When even the great globe itself, with all which it inhabits,
Shall dissolve; and like the baseless fabric of a vision,
Leave not a wreck behind."

Very providentially, we met with nothing to annoy us, either from the enemy, the weather, or from within; and after a pleasant run, we made the east end of Jamaica in due time all well. Kingston harbour – one of the finest and most singular in the world – lies on the south-west of the island, about halfway between the extreme points. On the north side of the entrance to the harbour, a bold headland, called Portland Point, juts out to a considerable distance, and forms a crutch, in which is the

very narrow entrance to the harbour. The land from Port Morant is high, with a bold shore, till within a few miles of Portland Point. It then suddenly falls low and flat; indeed, just a narrow slip of sandbank, about two hundred yards broad, and twelve or fifteen feet above high water level, and inside of which is the harbour. The most expert engineer, with all his skill, could not construct a more beautiful breakwater, nor a more efficient one. The approach to the harbour is a narrow channel, of sufficient depth for any vessel, and runs parallel with the breakwater, outside of which are dangerous shoals for miles in extent. While running down this channel, neither harbour nor entrance to it is visible from the ship's deck, till close upon Portland Point, against which a stranger would imagine he was about to run the ship's head; when, to the right, at right angles with the land, a narrow passage, like a moderate-sized river, shews itself between the point of the palisade – as the breakwater is called – and Portland Point. This is the inlet, and on the point of the palisade stands the town of Port Royal, where the man-o-war ships lie, and the King's stores are kept. The entrance was much narrower at one time than it is now, as, many years ago, the old town of Port Royal, that occupied the extreme point of the palisade, was sunk by an earthquake, so that the ships now anchor over the site of the old town, and the new town is built on the present point.

The description of this earthquake is altogether an appalling affair. The whole town, with all that it contained, animate and inanimate, went down in a moment to a great depth, and several of the vessels narrowly escaped being engulfed in the whirlpool, and reports tell us that all who were saved of the inhabitants of the town, were a few picked up by the ship's boats, whom the reaction of the water threw to the surface, after their horrid plunge. It is also reported that the *debris* of the old town is visible at the bottom of the present harbour, but of this I can

say nothing, as I never had a chance of examining it. One unmistakable evidence of the same dreadful visitation is palpable, in the splitting of one of the blue mountains from top to bottom, and that will remain to all time an evidence of the power of the destructive element, and there cannot be a doubt but the breakwater has been thrown up by a similar convulsion, at an earlier period.

I told you my duty was to steer the ship from sunrise to sunset, and at Port Morant we got a pilot to direct us to Port Royal, as a lot of sandbanks lie along the coast. But, however intent on obeying his orders, I could not help taking stock of the face of the black beauty. There he was strutting about as proud as the Admiral of the Channel Fleet, his nose as flat as a pancake, with two red holes in it an inch in diameter, high cheek bones, and a long chin; ears like saucers, but with lovely eyes and teeth. However, I managed to obey him to his satisfaction. On the breakwater – so often spoken of – about a mile above Port Royal, at high water mark stood seventeen wooden frames – two side posts with a cross bar at the top, at which – notwithstanding my attention to the orders of my red-nosed friend, Mumbo Jumbo – I could not avoid casting an occasional glance in passing. They were old gibbets with the iron framework in which the victims had been suspended, swinging and shrieking on their rusty hinges, the sight and sound of which made me shiver. I had seen two before on the banks of the Thames, below Blackwall, in which two pirates had been exposed. The occupants of these horrid frames in this case, I found out, were seventeen seamen, mutineers, part of the crew of a British frigate, the officers of which they had murdered, and carried her into an enemy's port. They were thus made a horrible example of.

In rounding to, to enter the harbour, we had to pass close under the stern of the Tartar frigate which was at anchor, in

shore of which was a French eighty-gun ship and La Creole frigate, both prizes. We were hailed to heave to, when a Lieutenant and eight men boarded us, in order to press. After stepping on to the quarter-deck the Lieutenant ordered the hands to be turned up, as he wished to see them. He was truly told that they were all present, on which he became quite indignant, and asked the captain if he intended to insult him, by telling him that the crew before him had brought the ship from Barbadoes, and ordered his boat's crew to search the ship. After every possible place had been searched without effect, he swore they had been landed on the palisade. Where there is nothing, even the king loses his right; so there was nothing for him but to make the best of what was before him. The armourer – a blacksmith – was a very short thick personage, which extreme bandy legs, and on the officer asking him what he was, he told him, and that he had a lame leg, and could be of no use, at the drawing up the leg of his trousers and showing a very crooked limb. The officer, however, was not to be gammoned. He asked him to walk forward, when it turned out that both the legs had been cast in the same mould, and he was ordered into the boat. The next victim was a boy reduced to a skeleton by flux. He, too, was sent over side. I was the only other person susceptible of being pressed, and continued on my seat by the wheel, when he came and put the usual question – “what are you?” I said nothing, but held up my bandaged foot. He said no more but went away, and soon returned with the doctor to examine me, and I got clear, when, after getting bills for the pay due to his two victims, with all their effects, and putting hands aboard to work us up to Kingston, he left us.

I have endeavoured to give you a sketch of the seaward side of this beautiful sheet of water, but the loch itself is of surpassing loveliness. It is an oblong square, covering a surface of fourteen square miles, in a calm morning lying as smooth and

motionless as a frozen lake. When round the point at Port Royal everything is land-looked – say in a rough way – the south and north ends are closed in with high land. On the landward, or east side, the ground is low and flat; the town of Kingston standing about midway up the harbour on that side, and that marvellous sea-wall on the west, the palisade, running the whole length, like a high ridge in a level field, is a perfect security against any encroachment from the sea. We anchored close in with the town; and as soon as sheds could be got the whole of the slaves who were in a healthy state were landed, while the sick were still kept on board. As small-pox was the principal complaint – a disease very infectious and fatal in a hot climate – the authorities were very chary of allowing an infected subject to be landed. Sad havoc had been made by this loathsome disease and flux during the middle passage, so that, notwithstanding every attention, more than thirty died, and a number more were in a precarious state. Since we came into harbour, the disposal of the dead bodies became a more difficult matter than when at sea, when they were dropped overboard. But as that could not be done in the harbour, the corpse had to be taken to the palisade and buried in the sand. This office – not a very respectable, but a very necessary one – fell to my share, with an assistant; and the manner of performing it must appear very heartless and repulsive to the feelings of every one accustomed to the solemnity exhibited on these occasions in civilized society; but due allowance must be accorded to the position in which we were placed, and the state of the subject to be disposed of. It is well known into what a mass of corruption the human body is turned by small-pox, and any person may imagine how disgusting an affair it would be to handle this naked mass – handing it into and out of a boat for instance – carrying it from the boat to the grave; besides, my friend Tom and I had not strength to do so. Our method was to fasten a rope round the body, lower the body into

the water, fasten the rope to the stern of the boat, tow it ashore and bury it in the sand. We were servants under very arbitrary authority – the thing must be done; and the quickest and simplest plan we considered the best. Consider, too, how many noble and gallant men are cut off in battle to gratify the pride and ambition of emperors and kings by the curse of war! See thousands of such brave fellows cut off and huddled into temporary pits with much less ceremony than was paid by us to a naked son of Ham! “Look on *this* picture and on *that*,” and tell me where lies the mighty difference. It is certainly very natural for every one to see the due rights of sepulture paid to the remains of their friends and relatives when circumstances will permit, but every one also knows well that it is all mere ceremony.

“But see, the well-plum’d hearse comes nodding on,
Stately and slow; and properly attended
By the whole sable tribe that painful watch
The sick man’s door, and live upon the dead
By letting out their persons by the hour,
To mimic sorrow when the heart’s not sad.
How rich the trappings, now they’re all unfurl’d
And glittering in the sun: triumphant entries
Of conquerors and coronation-pomps
In glory scarce exceed.”

Yet, with all this pomp and pageantry –

“There’s not a dungeon slave that’s buried
In the highway, unshrouded and uncoffin’d
But lies as soft and sleeps as sound as he.”

To traffic in human beings is a wicked and unjustifiable thing. But will any one say that the soldier or sailor, who was pressed into service, was, in any degree, less a slave than the poor African who was carried to the West Indies? In a great many cases the balance is in favour of the African; he is well lodged, well fed, moderately wrought, and – if he is not a thief or a drunkard – well used every way. Whether this may arise

from selfishness of the owner is not my present business: it is sufficient for my present argument that he is – comparatively, comfortable; while the soldier or sailor is compelled by a power he cannot resist, to imbrue his hands in the blood of those called enemies, or be butchered himself, to gratify the ambition of wicked men who make war a pastime; and, if he refuse, is flagged or shot like a rabid dog. Which of the two is the most abject state of slavery? Well, saith the poet, “Were subjects wise, war is a game kings would not play at.”

While on this subject allow me to tell you of a more unceremonious disposal of a corpse than any yet alluded to. The captain went ashore one morning and did not come aboard until near midnight. One of the slaves was very ill when he went ashore, and had died in the evening – too late, as the mate rightly considered, for us to bury him. The first question the captain asked, was, “if the man was dead?” On being answered in the affirmative, “Is he buried?” No. “Do you take him ashore at once,” was the order, with a deep oath or two to clinch it. It was pitch dark, and two miles to the burying ground; but orders must be obeyed. No one, except myself and my assistant, had ever been there; and there was only one convenient place to land – the whole of the shore of the harbour on the side of the palisade being thickly covered with prickly pear bushes, even into the water. We had at once to get into the boat, with the corpse in tow; and, as a punishment, the second mate was ordered to accompany us, with two black men, who were hired from the shore to look after the sick, and other work. It was a very gloomy affair; a four mile pull in a night as dark as a wolf's mouth, with a corpse under our stern a part of the time; but to the mate the thing was very obnoxious; the affront the worst part of it. Landmarks we had none; so, to stand right across the harbour as near as we could guess, was all we had for it. In about the usual time we made the land, but, unluckily, not at the right

place; the bushes met us everywhere. After several attempts without success, the mate loosened the end of the rope from the boat to which the corpse was fast, and fastened it to the stem of a bush, and left him floating in the water. By this time the mate's wrath, which he had been "nursing and keeping warm," came to the boiling point; and, after getting a portion of the bile off by a few minutes' excessive swearing, he ordered us to pull away for Port Royal, as he never would set his foot on board of the b----y hooker again – he would go aboard a man-of-war. Away we pulled, groping our way down, close by the bushes for about a mile or so, when he – being cooled down a bit by the cursing match, perhaps – changed his mind, and turned the boat's head once more homewards, when we soon got aboard the old Crescent again, and sought our hammocks much fatigued.

As may be supposed, in a land-locked harbour such as Kingston, in eighteen degrees of latitude, intense heat is experienced. This is the case, particularly in the morning before the sea breeze sets in – say about ten o'clock, when a delightful cooling wind blows out, bringing immense relief from the broiling, almost unbearable, blaze of heat sent down upon Kingston as soon as the sun shews itself over the blue mountains to the east. One of these mountains, I told you, was rent asunder from top to bottom by the earthquake which sunk the town of Port Royal, and stands now as a practical proof of the power of those elements contained in the earth's bowels when put in motion to work out the purposes of "Him who laid the foundations of the earth, and hung the north over the empty space." Those elements, directed by Him who created them, will – when the proper time arrive – purify this earth from every stain, moral and physical, and make it suitable for *one* of the purposes for which it was created. This blue mountain I spoke of is a curious object. It is an immense hill, and stands now just as if you would place an orange on a table and cut it down the

centre, leaving the halves facing one another, allowing each of them to fall back a little, and gradually widen at the top.

I have been very pleasantly employed since we came here, having the charge of a large boat and four stout fellows for supplying the ship with water. I start about sunrise every morning, and row about two miles up the harbour; it is then quite smooth; fill our casks and down again before the sea breeze sets in. The harbour at this time is delightful, everything so quiet and peaceful, with canoes in great numbers stealing gently among the ships, selling spruce beer, a very pleasant cooling drink in such hot weather. One morning lately, I met with disaster. By some chance I was too late in starting down, the sea breeze setting in before we got off; and being deeply loaded I was obliged to run ashore till the evening, narrowly escaped being swamped, which would have been a dangerous thing for me, as you know I cannot swim. It is quite amusing to see the lazy slovenly way the darkies work. Those driving horses walk and mount on the right hand side; and every evening as soon as they unyoke, they jump onto the horse's back and gallop down to the harbour, dash man and horse right in, swim the horses a long way out, turn their heads for the shore, threw themselves off and all swim ashore together; it must be very refreshing to all parties. Their waggons for transporting sugar and rum to the ports, are huge unwieldy machines, each drawn by from fourteen to twenty bullocks. And the screeching of the great clumsy wooden wheels and axles, the shouts of the drivers and cracking of long cowskin whips, altogether produce a confusion of sounds, scarce ever heard since the dispersion at Babel.

The land on which the town of Kingston stands is part of a level plain of great extent running up to the foot of the blue mountain. The town itself has been laid out in regular square blocks, by wide streets running at right angles; the majority of the houses built of wood; no street doors, the entrance being by

a wide gateway into a back court. The houses are generally two stories high, with balconies running round the court-side level with the upper floors; an outside stair leads up to the balcony, and the room doors open off it to the bedrooms. The balcony is covered by a continuation of the house roof, and open all round in front. The absence of doors to the street, and the necessity of using venetian blinds to the windows for ventilation, give the streets a dull appearance; and as none but darkies are moving in the heat of the day, the place has an unpleasant dulness.

It is impossible for any one who has seen the negro on his native soil and after he has been a few years in the West Indies, not to observe a remarkable difference. At home he is a slave – stalking about in naked majesty, liable to be immolated on the grave of his chief to deprecate the wrath of an imaginary demon – his manner sullen and aimless; in fact, a very hopeless animal for good either to himself or any one else. When established on an estate in Jamaica, a comfortable cabin is provided for him; daily rations, with clothes suitable for his work; with a piece of land upon which he raises vegetables and fruit, keeps a stock of pigs, goats, and poultry, with the whole of every Saturday to cultivate and dispose of the produce, which in many cases he is able to do to such an extent as to purchase his freedom, and in many cases to have all the necessities and even many of the luxuries of life. And on the wharfs and public promenades of Kingston on Sundays are to be seen hundreds of negroes of both sexes, as well dressed – certainly more gaudily – as any working people I ever saw any where, and enjoying themselves with a buoyancy of mirth wholly their own. Slaves they are, certainly – more's the pity, poor fellows! – but entirely free from that care-worn expression too often met with in the countenances and bearing of the peasantry of Great Britain. And on passing along the streets of Kingston, where they chiefly reside, I could not

help feeling surprised at the great number of houses where music and dancing were going on in the evening. They seem to have a strong natural taste for music, and many of them turn out first-rate performers on the violin and other instruments; indeed, their musical proclivities are visible even in the absence of instruments. In their festivals at home they caper as boisterously, and get as much excited by the rub-a-dub patterning of the fingers on an empty calabash and the rattling of a few dried nuts hung on a string, as a half-drunk Irishman would do on a barn floor with Judy before him, and the best piper in Ireland inspiring him by the lively old air of "Morgan Rattlers." Their mode of dancing is very primitive; leaping about, tossing their limbs in all manner of ways, all the while muttering, with a jerking expression, jig, jigra, jig, jig, in a state of great excitement.

I was much amused by the manoeuvres gone through at a negro's funeral in Kingston. When one dies the masters allow their servants in the locality to attend the funeral. On such occasions they enjoy themselves very much. Having by begging and clubbing their own stock, raised something to purchase rum, they assemble in the street in front of the house, and commence dancing jigra jig to the rub-a-dub of the calabash. When tired of this they bring out the coffin, which two of them take on their heads. The whole move off very steady, the begging process still going on with much energy. The smallest coin in the West Indies is a small silver coin called a half bit, value twopence-halfpenny; more frequently a bit, or fivepence is the offering, so that they are all kept in high spirits. They have one very effective method of raising the wind which they take due advantage of. During their progress – when passing a respectable house where they knew by experience something may be got – the two who have the coffin on their heads begin to stagger and step backwards, at the same time both begin to talk as if remonstrating with the corpse – "ah! you no go eh, high – you savvie buckra man lib

dar – hah, you want rum – eh – bah, you tink buckra lub niger,” all the time reeling about, the whole group seeming very serious – while their great black eyes are twinkling with fun and frolic. When the donation is made the corpse seems satisfied, and moves on, the bearers admonishing him to behave better for the future. For a few nights after the interment a quantity of meat in a calabash and some rum is placed by the grave, which, as might be expected disappear before morning.

They carry everything on their head, as well as coffins. An amusing instance may be given. This I have from hearsay, though I believe it to be quite true. A planter, wishing for a more expeditious way of transporting stuff, where carts could not be employed, got a lot of wheelbarrows made to be used instead of the basket on the head; his surprise may be guessed when, going out to see how the work is getting on, he met one of his negroes moving slowly along with the wheelbarrow on his head; no persuasion could induce him to wheel it. Their hoes, too, have to be made heavy enough to sink the desired depth into the earth from their own weight; the foolish fellows being so lazy and stupid as not to see how much more toil it is to lift such a mass of iron than to put a little more force to the blow of a lighter tool. Indeed their besetting sins – for they have four of them – are laziness, drunkenness, stealing and lying; and I am convinced that could these bad habits be got the better of, such a thing as punishment would seldom be resorted to.

It is very amusing to notice the very contemptuous, sneering way the old darkey exhibits when taking stock of a new arrival while walking about the wharf on a Sunday. There he is, generally with a lady on his arm, strutting about with his ruffled shirt, white as snow, with a collar up to his ears, starched stiff as the lee-boards of a Dutch lugger, on which one might imagine his head was hung. This black dandy, instead of showing sympathy for the new comers, which he would naturally do if he

felt himself miserable, will pass along flourishing his white pocket handkerchief, with the air of a French dancing master, showing two rows of teeth from ear to ear, while grinning with perfect contempt at what he calls "the stupid green nigger".

My old superstitious fear has not quite left me yet – since I came here it cost me one very miserable night. My ankle being still out of order, I was put under the care of an old lady, in a street called Rum Lane, where I stayed several weeks without much benefit. All ignorant people are superstitious, and my landlady and household being something like on par in that particular, we dealt a good deal in gossip of the supernatural kind. Among many other unquestionable facts of this nature, she told me of a butcher who had been foully murdered many years ago at the other end of the street. The street ran down a moderate incline, ending at the harbour. Our house was about half-way in the street, and was enclosed in a court shut in by folding doors, as I have already described. For the benefit of fresh air, I spread my hammock under the balcony in the open court, while two old and three young ladies all slept in the upper rooms entering from the balcony; consequently I was the only person in the lower region of the premises, and, of course, more liable to be got hold of by the ghost than those locked up in the hold-fast places. It seems that a visit is paid to this locality on one special night every year by the poor butcher's ghost, which appears as a large calf surrounded with chains, and called the rolling calf, and at midnight comes tumbling down the whole length of the street, the calf bellowing and chains rattling in a very alarming manner. My landlady treated us to the whole story, with all its aggravations, at dinner on the day during the night of which the annual visit was to be paid; and as the thing was an established fact – though she confessed she never heard it herself – we were all sufficiently horrified. As long as daylight continued and the family were below, I felt little alarm; but when it became dark

and they were all locked up, I began to feel rather uncomfortable. However, as I had been ashamed to confess my cowardice by going inside for the night, there was nothing for it but to “screw my courage to the sticking point” and abide the event. Had there been a running stream between the ghost and me it would have been all right, as I was well aware that “a runnin’ stream they daurna cross,” but as there was only a wooden gate, it altered the case very materially, as I had often heard of ghosts coming through even a keyhole. It was still five weary hours to the time of his coming, and I could not sleep. I had no alternative but to brace up my nerves for the coming event, by conjuring up all the ghost and fairy lore so firmly believed in by many of the natives of the sweet green hills and romantic glens of dear old Galloway. The one nearest home was naturally the first that occurred to my mind – the white lady of Barnbarrow – who, you know, frightened so many, till conjured and ordered to retire beyond Cairnsmore for “a hunner year and mair.” Now, the term *mair* being not easily defined, she has never ventured back. Then the ghost of the Clairry, which, as far as I know, is still at large. Then came the remarkable Brownie of Barhoash Mill, on the river Bladnoch, who wrought the mill, cut the corn and hay on the farm, broke into harness the young horses, and bughted the sheep, among whom were often found a few hares, of which he often complained, declaring that the “wee broon anes gied him mair trouble than a’ the ithers.” All this he did by night, remaining invisible by day, and all he demanded as wages was “a cogie-fu’ o’ brose.” He was a useful servant while the miller remained a bachelor; but, unfortunately, he married, and the mistress having got a blink of the Brownie one night, and seeing him naked, laid a pair of the miller’s inexpressibles down beside the brose. The Brownie took the hint and disappeared. The story of the old White, miller of Creech, whose grand-mother was kidnapped and taken to the *dun* of Arbreck, beside Whithorn,

to suckle a young fairy, but somehow got information to her husband of her whereabouts, sending him at the same time a box of ointment to rub his eyes with, so as to enable him to see the entrance into the *dún*, which was invisible to unaided human eyes, and to see her when he entered. He was to walk direct up to his wife, with a round three-footed stool on his head – not to speak, but to take her by the hand and walk out. All this he is said to have done, and that she bore him several children afterward, but was never seen to smile. The three-footed stool did him “yeoman’s service,” for when coming out of the *dún*, a tremendous blow from some spiteful old fairy shivered the stool all to fragments, while old White got cleared off. These are only a sample of the consoling legends that flitted across my mind. But at last I fell asleep; and if reason could not control my superstitious reveries when awake, it is not to be wondered at that fancy took up the theme while I slept, and kept it up till I imagined I heard the bellowing of the calf and the rattling of the chain close at hand. I awoke from the agitation – snatched up my blanket and bolted upstairs; but afraid and agitated though I was, I had too much pride to let any one know it, so I wrapped my blanket round me and lay on the floor close to the door till daylight. Whether the ghost passed while I slept I do not know, but certainly I did not hear him while awake.

I do believe, from what has come under my observation while here, that the state of society in this place is as low and degraded as it is possible to conceive – a perfect Sodom! With the exception of those who have married in Europe, there is scarce such a thing heard of as marriage. Among the lower tribe prostitution is the rule in every sense of the word. In the middle class concubinage is the order of the day. I will attempt to give you a sketch of the everyday life of the two middle-aged ladies – sisters – with whom I boarded. They were never married, nor had they any conception of the use or value of marriage, and

were quite astonished to hear that my mother bore seven children to one man. They are Mulattoes, two removes from the black, and their daughters almost white, their fathers having been white men. They live by the prostitution of their daughters, whom they hire for a given time – as the case may be – for a consideration, and who during that time remain quite faithful to their *marriage*, as they call it, and they believe the thing to be right and proper. There seems to be a devilish morality in the system which keeps females faithful to such an engagement, as one act of unfaithfulness would injure their character as much as a married woman would do by a breach of the seventh commandment. They even go a step further. In the event of their engagement including a period during which their keepers must be absent, as is necessarily often the case with periodical visitors, still they must be faithful, otherwise they lose their caste and sink into common prostitutes. The old lady – my doctor – had a daughter, a very pretty, handsome young woman, who maintained them both comfortably by letting herself out in this way; the older sister had a daughter and another young girl, who all acted on the same principle without the most distant idea that anything was wrong.

As for the Sabbath day, the “niggers’ holiday” as it is called, the parties I have been describing turn it into every use except the one it was instituted for. The negroes keep it up on the same principle, though in a still lower scale. Still, however, the picture has a somewhat brighter side; and as Sodom would have been saved if five righteous persons could have been found in it, Jamaica is not without a sprinkling of those who are not ashamed of the truth, and who act upon it. This redeeming quality is the effect of the work of a few unassuming missionaries, and the good results of their labours are, I am led to believe, very visible throughout the island among the negroes – one reason why they have been benefited by a change of masters.

Excursions of parties of pleasure into the country, from Kingston, is a common way of spending the Sunday, and I have to relate a very unpleasant affair resulting from the practice.

Our captain with a party, had gone to the head of the harbour one Sunday morning, by land, leaving orders that the mate should take up the pinnace, our largest boat, which was schooner-rigged, and sailed well when properly handled, to bring the party down in the evening. It so happened that a very strong breeze blew all that day, causing a considerable degree of commotion in the harbour. We had some black men hired to do ship duty, and about mid-day the mate, with two blacks, got into the boat and stood away; and as the head of the harbour is to the windward of the town, he had to beat up against the wind to reach it. There are many good seamen who are not good boat sailors, and Mr Murdoch was one of them. Instead of keeping the boat a little free, to allow her to walk through the water, he kept her hanging to near the wind, with the weather leech of sails shivering, which kept her pitching into the high swell and caused her to ship so much water that it kept the black fellows busy bailing to keep her clear. All this we saw during the time we watched her progress, which was very slow. Indeed from the time the boat left us we had great doubts of her safety. On that account we never took our eyes off her, especially when it became necessary for her to go round on the other tack. Nor were we mistaken. Murdoch had got close in with the palisade, and when in the act of putting about, in place of keeping away a little to gather headway, he put his helm down, throwing his sails back, without way enough on the boat to come round. The consequence was, what might have been expected, she gave a plunge or two and disappeared. The second mate and I, with four blackies, got into the boat, and pulled away with all our might; but as the wind was against us, and the water lumpy, while the distance was nearly two miles, it would have been all over

with them so far as our help was concerned. When we reached the place all we could see was a hat and oars floating about, while nearby was a watering boat belonging to a man-of-war at Port Royal, who had picked up Murdoch in a very exhausted state, and one of the blacks – the other having gone down with the boat. The mate had a very narrow escape, the drowning man had got tangled in the boat rigging, and, when sinking, caught him by the leg and dragged him down; but, being a powerful man, he managed to shake him off. The two saved were very much knocked up. We got them safe aboard however. About midnight the captain hailed the ship from the wharf, charged to the muzzle; and when told the reason why the boat did not come, he exploded on the mate to some purpose. The storm soon blew over, however, as poor Murdoch could make no reply, and the skipper knowing that no amount of swearing would bring up the boat, the affair was dropped. This was the second boat, with one seaman and three black men, which we lost during this dreary voyage, with about forty slaves by death from smallpox and other causes, which alone was a loss of two thousand pounds.

We are shipping a cargo of mahogany, logwood, and allspice, or Jamaica pepper, for London; and are looking out for a crew for the run home. This is a very difficult matter, as the press is so hot that the few seamen who have escaped are obliged to keep hid in the country till they hear of the sailing of the fleet, when they steal in by night, secure a berth, and come aboard at sailing time, as they cannot be pressed from an outward-bound vessel. The war still ranging, it is necessary for the merchant ships to make for home in a body, under convoy of one or more king's ships; and as report states there are over one hundred sail of merchant-men, there are grave doubts whether a sufficient number of fugitives will be procurable to man the fleet. There are about fifteen hundred seamen in the French prison here, and a proposition has been made to supply the deficiency of crew from

the prison, paying them full wages for the run. And as an English prison is much preferable to a West India one, they will gladly embrace the chance of winning a few pounds, with the advantage of being nearer to home when an exchange of prisoners takes place. Hoping that this will reach you in due course, and having the pleasure of telling you that it leaves me in good health and my ankle improving, and that if all be well my next will be from London, I shall close this rambling epistle by assuring you of what I daresay you have no doubt, that I am ever your's truly,
S.R.



LETTER IX.

London, 1804.

If my last from Jamaica has reached you, you will understand me when I tell you that, after all the British seamen we could get hold of, we were still shorthanded, and obliged to supply the deficiency from the French prison, by shipping six men and a boy, to make up a very indifferent crew. All the merchantmen round the island got instructions to rendezvous at Morant Bay on the south-east end, and wait for sailing orders and signal books from the Commodore, under whose orders we were to be placed; and during the passage home, if we lost the fleet or disobeyed orders, and fell into the hands of a French privateer, although the ship be insured, the underwriters will not be responsible. The fleet having mustered, and our convoy arrived, which consisted of the Cumberland of 74 guns, and La Creole frigate of 36, and having got orders and signal books, we weighed anchor and stood away to the eastward, to work through what is called the windward passage – the space between the islands of Cuba and St Domingo. The weather was delightful, and should I live for a hundred years, and retain my memory, the sight before me that morning could never be forgotten. At our head was the magnificent 74 Cumberland, a sheet of canvas from truck to bulwarks, following as best we could above one hundred sail of large merchant ships, scattered over a few miles of surface, and whipped-in by the 36 gun frigate; the lovely green isle of Jamaica under our lee; the lofty mountains of St Domingo away to the south, and the blue hills of Cuba to the north – a sight seldom to be seen and never to be forgotten.

Before sailing, all the captains went on board the

Cumberland and got instructions and signal-books, consisting of small flags painted of different colours in the book, and numbered; so that when we saw a flag hoisted at the gaff of the Commodore, the book was examined, where was found a facsimile of the flag with the explanation, when we ran up an answer to shew that we had seen the signal. The signal might be to make or shorten sail, change course, close up, &c. I got charge of the signal-book, and took much pleasure in attending to it. During the night the signals were made by lanterns at the Commodore's gaff, but did not require an answer. It was a source of much ease and comfort to all concerned, that our ship was a good sailor, and what is called a "dry" ship, which means she did not ship much water on deck in stormy weather. And while numbers were obliged to be kept under every stitch of canvas the weather would possibly allow, and in stormy weather almost burying them-selves, we dodged along close by the Cumberland very comfortably. Among such a number of ships it was to be expected there would be dull ones; this was the case with our fleet. Those slow ones were a source of great annoyance and discomfort to the frigate, besides lengthening out the voyage very grievously. It was part of the frigates duty to tow up those who fell a-stern, so as to have the fleet well together by sunset, at which time the Commodore fired a gun, and kept a light at his gaff all night.

We got on quite well till we got into variable winds, when, as the winter was set in, we began to feel every day colder than the one before it, as we "dragged our slow length along" to the north-eastward; and about Christmas, when we were in the neighbourhood of the banks of Newfoundland, the cold was almost unbearable. This was not surprising, when it is considered that the transition in so short a time was from degrees of heat ranging between eighty and a hundred to zero—often much below it. My young friend, Cojoe, the passenger from Acra I

spoke of before, felt the cold very severely. It was somewhat amusing to see the poor fellow, how alarmed and miserable he got on feeling a sensation he could not understand, and could get no one to give a satisfactory explanation of; however, he did the better of us in one respect – he did not look a bit the paler for it. His case reminded me of an anecdote respecting a countryman of his in a similar position. The poor fellow, while fidgeting about under the influence of severe cold, was asked what was the matter with him – “Me no sabby – don’t know – Massa, something biting me – me no see him.”

I must tell you a very singular thing which befel me one night lately. Part of our cargo was composed of logwood, which is in billets a few feet long and about as thick as a man’s thigh, very rugged and full of holes. These holes give shelter to lots of reptiles of different kinds, scorpions, centipedes, and many others. The centipede exactly resembles our sloe worm. I have seen them above six inches long. They have two rows of feet closely set from stem to stern, with alternate strips of black and yellow round the body. The space between decks was stowed full of these billets till within about two feet of the upper deck, so that the steward and I spread our beds on the top of the wood, having just room to creep on to them between the wood and deck. One night I was crawling along to get to bed, and on reaching it and laying my hand on the blanket I felt a sharp sting on one of my fingers close by the nail. It being quite dark, I shouted to the steward to bring a light, when we found a large scorpion who was making himself very comfortable. We secured him and carried him into the cabin to the doctor, when he was condemned and executed by drowning in rum. By the time we got into the cabin my finger was getting black round the nail and swelling; and after the viper had been in the rum for some time a piece of lint was dipped into the liquid and kept wet round the finger for several days, when it got all right again. I felt not

much pain, but a sense of numbness for a time. Were you to see a scorpion you would at once conclude he was a toad of the dandy class, exactly the same ugly black mass, with handsomer feet and legs, and more round in the body than the toad. My friend was about the size of a watch and much the same shape, but he sported a tail similar to the lizard tribe broader where it joined the body, terminating in a dart, and about two inches long. Whether he stung me with his tail, or bit me, I had no means of knowing. I have him preserved in a bottle of rum. One night shortly after, the second mate was awakened by what turned out to be a centipede endeavouring to make a lodgement in his ear.

Shortly after Christmas, we had a succession of heavy gales for some weeks, with very short intervals, the greater part of the time lying-to, consequently making slow progress homeward. It is awfully grand and wonderful to witness the agitation produced by a long continuance of heavy gales in the Atlantic Ocean. As long as the wind is fair for the ship's course, some progress may be made, even during a heavy gale; but after days of hard gales, it is considered the most prudent way to lie to – that is, to fix the helm to the one side, and keep it in that position, with a single small sail to steady the vessel – say, a forestay sail, close-reefed foresail, mizzen staysail, spanker, or close-reefed main-topsail, and the secret is to find out under which of these sails she lies-too most steadily; for it is well known that every ship has her peculiar trim, and it is the duty of every officer to endeavour to find it out. In this way a vessel will come-too and fall-off a few points, but will neither broach-too nor get before the wind. When the waves get to about their average height, say thirty or forty feet, following one another in regular succession, with “A long dark melancholy vale between,” while in the trough of the sea a momentary calm is experienced, when on comes the huge green mountainridge, apparently higher than the mastheads: up this green slope the good ship gracefully ascends,

when the roaring gale meets her in all its fury; anon she sinks gradually down, while the lee yardarms ripple the retiring wave as she sinks again into the vale.

In this way, days, nights, even weeks may be spent with perfect safety; but the green monster does not always pass so majestically and harmlessly as I have attempted to describe. A watch has to be continually kept on the coming wave, to observe its form. If it approaches in a round solid body, it is harmless; but if the ridge gets sharp, and begins to curl, with a white mane, the alarm is given, and the sooner one gets hold of the weather shrouds and bends down his head to meet it the better. On it comes like a wall, and strikes the ship with a thud that makes everything shiver again; sometimes passing over her many feet above the deck, clearing away boats, bulwarks, and often part of the crew. I never was witness to havoc like this, though I have had a fair share of rough weather. I used to look sharply round sometimes, when on the crest of a wave, to ascertain how many vessels I could get under my eye. There was often a grand glimpse; perhaps five or six ships would be seen for a few seconds, in many different positions, and at different distances – one or two hanging on the crest like ourselves, some going down, some rising up, while here and there appeared the mastheads of several as if growing out of this dreadful war of elements. But the subsiding of this turmoil is often the strangest and most alarming state of all. While the wind blows steadily from one quarter, the sea may rise to a great height; but the waves follow each other so regularly that no confusion is apparent. In the event of the gale subsiding, while blowing from the same point, the waves gradually sink to their natural level. But if, as is often the case, the wind checks suddenly round to the opposite quarter, a state of confusion of a most dangerous kind is the consequence. The battle is very fierce for a time, but the wind is the conqueror. The waves seem broken up into all

manner of shapes, often meeting one another in full career, when they are lashed into foam as if striking against a rock; it is really "confusion worse confounded." This is the most alarming state of all. The ship is knocked about and kept rolling so heavily as often to roll the masts overboard.

On the subsidence of those gales, an event occurred which thousands of the oldest seamen never witnessed, nor would ever desire to witness, except in a case like ours, where no lives were put in jeopardy – a ship on fire. The gallant and beautiful frigate *La Creole*, which kept such faithful watch over our sternmost ships, had been a long time cruising in the Carribean Sea before she was taken – she was a French prize – and had lain long in Port Royal previous to joining our fleet, consequently she could scarcely be expected to be quite seaworthy in such weather, as we encountered. And considering the immense straining she must have undergone in towing up lazy ships in all kinds of weather, with a top hamper of thirty-six guns, it was not to be wondered at that she got leaky, and that the terrible shaking up which we had all experienced had told fatally on her. The fact was, that for some time before the weather I have been describing took a favourable change, all her pumps had been at work day and night, and scarcely sufficed to keep her afloat. As soon as a lull came, so as a boat could live on the boiling caldron, the British ensign, union down – a signal of distress – was seen flying at the peak of the gallant frigate, and a signal from the Admiral ordering the fleet to stand on their course. The *Cumberland* hove to till the frigate came up, which also hove to. In a very short time, during which boats were busily between the ships, the *Cumberland* made sail, and left the fated *La Creole* to her doom, with everything standing, her mainyards aback, as if nothing particular had taken place. This delusion did not last long; very soon smoke was seen streaming up the hatchways, and out of the portholes, with an occasional tongue of fire

glancing through it. She had been fired in different places, and well was the powerful element doing its work; a short time served to place the space between decks in a sheet of flame; the guns went off as the fire reached them, the flame caught the sails and rigging; and in a shorter time than it requires to tell it, the ship was on fire from truck to the water's edge. Few people will dispute the fact that a British frigate is one of the grandest and most magnificent objects which the eye can look upon. This is true of her in her every day life. But who can see this grand object in one sheet of living fire on the blue bosom of the mighty deep, without feeling an emotion he cannot describe. A short time sufficed to settle the whole affair. The fire soon reached the magazine; a roar was heard like the bellow of Mount Stromboli, while glowing fragments of the *La Creole* were thrown high into the air – the waters closing over the blazing hull, looking as innocent as if nothing particular had taken place.

Truly the elements of nature have no sympathy with man. The *La Creole* was become a thing of other days. So is it with man. Were the wisest sage on earth to die to-night, to-morrow's sun would rise as brisk as ever; like a pebble thrown into a peaceful lake, a few circles may agitate the surface of the society in which he moved; but so far as the sympathies are concerned, he has "died and left no sign." Pope tells us that the Master of the universe "Sees with equal eye, as God of all, a hero perish or a sparrow fall;" but this sentiment has its limit. How often have we heard, "with bated breath," tales of the face of nature having been agitated by dreadful storms of wind, rain, and thunder on the occasion of the funeral of certain individuals whose names were quite familiar to us, as having served faithfully the prince of darkness in their day and generation. Grierson, of Lagg, for example, a hell-hound of no common order as a Scottish persecutor, at whose funeral the elemental war is said to have been awful –

"The wind blew as 'twad blown its last,
The rattlin' show'rs rose on the blast,
The lightning's gleams the darkness swallow'd,
Deep, loud, and lang the thunder bellow'd."

The horse drawing the hearse, it would seem – having a knack of seeing spirits in certain circumstances – got restive at a certain spot, and when, by much exertion, the company reached the place of sepulture the coffin was so light that it was quite evident Lagg's old master, whom he had served with so much fidelity and zeal, had played the company a scurvy trick, by carrying the old gentleman's body clean off. Another palpable instance – the funeral of Kennedy of Colzean, whose corpse was clandestinely abstracted from the coffin by supernatural means. There is, however, an additional shade of romance in this case that, perhaps, you may not have heard, but which accounts satisfactorily for the destination of the body after the abstraction. The story runs that a certain Scottish merchant ship was on her voyage up the Mediterranean when, one morning about one o'clock, to the utter astonishment of the outlook on the fore-castle, he saw a large black coach drawn by six black horses, with two very suspicious-looking characters as coachman and postilion, rapidly approaching the ship. On it came, careering in splendid style, and in passing hailed the vessel in good seaman phrase – "What ship is that, and where are you from?" The captain, who must have been a fellow of some nerve, not only answered the old gentleman, but had the temerity to ask in return the whence and where bound of this singular *cortege*. The answer was quick and offhanded – "From Mount Etna to Colzean's burial;" and it was quite evident to the most sceptical that the machine that the machine had left the crater of the volcano, and would return forthwith with the body of old Kennedy. I am of opinion that, as all sailors are superstitious, the skipper would not have hailed the coachman so coura-

geously if he had known who he was and where he was bound. My impression is that he had looked upon the whole affair at first sight, as a bit of a frolic of old Neptune, or perhaps the common sea spirit Davy Jones, and that, as they were spirits so closely connected with his own line of business, he was quite safe in hailing the stranger. I see no harm in amusing ourselves at the expense of the superstitious weakness of those who believe that the elements can be affected by the death of any mere man. As I said before, there is no sympathy between the parties. So much is this the case, that the same storms would have blown on those days on which the remains of these two wicked men were put in the tomb, as if none of the two had ever been born or had ever died; and their death had no more to do with it than if it had so happened that a cadger's pony had that day fallen into, and died in a ditch. The poet Cowper speaks of persecutors – such as the Grahams, Coulters, Winrams, Turners, Griersons, Inglises, Lauderdale, and McKenzies, who have left so many landmarks throughout Scotland to testify whose servants they were, and to their own everlasting reprobation – as “Dragging their victims into fame, and chasing them up to heaven.” The figure is beautiful, though little were the monsters aware, and nothing did they care about consequences, provided they could gratify the cruel propensities of their own nature, and by so doing raise themselves higher in the opinion of their most cruel and merciless masters. We may indulge in a joke on a class of simple tales respecting their dead bodies, but the horrible state of their own minds, well recorded, and the misery they subjected their living victims to, are sad realities.

The loss of the frigate retarded our progress still more, as on approaching the British Channel, where shoals of French privateers were prowling about, the fleet had to be kept well in hand by the Commodore; and, as there was no towing up of heavy sailors now, the headway of the whole was necessarily

retarded. The weather continued of a stormy character generally, though we had no gale so protracted as that off the banks of Newfoundland.

Besides the young black passenger, we had a mad lawyer from Kingston, a great curiosity in his way. I believe he was an American who came to practise in Kingston, and acquired a considerable amount of property; but getting crazed, his friends came to the conclusion that the best way to get clear of him was to get him into a lunatic asylum in England, sagely considering that whatever effect it might have on him personally it was a good thing for them, as it shewed a very laudable amount of care and Christian charity toward their friend – although he was perfectly able to look after himself – and, a very important item in the transaction, transferred his estates into their hands. However, to do them justice so far, they shipped his body-servant, an active black man, to attend him, who was quite proud of the job, as the moment his foot touched English soil he was no more a slave – with a most liberal supply of everything necessary for his comfort during the voyage. Crazed he certainly was on some subjects; on others, sane and shrewd. Like Hamlet, he shewed a good deal of “method in his madness,” and, like him, was only “mad north-north-west: when the wind was southerly, he knew a hawk from a hand-saw.” Like most other Yankees, he had a mortal hatred to England; and the engrossing idea upon which he daily brooded, and upon which he wrote, every day and all day long, was that the Emperor of China was on his way with an enormous fleet and millions of men to invade England, and he assuredly believed that by the time we reached it London would be in full possession of the celestials. This notion kept his spirits at concert pitch during the whole voyage, cherished, no doubt, by the assurance he had of being raised to a very high position in the new dynasty.

Very amusing scenes took place daily at meal times in the

cabin between Mr Jackson and the chief mate, Murdoch. The captain and doctor humoured the old man, and things went on smoothly between them, but Murdoch was a blunt, unpolished specimen of humanity, and Jackson's ravings annoyed him exceedingly, so much so that he could not help contradicting him on all occasions, and the battle between them was sometimes very amusing, at other times distressing; as it was pitiable to see the poor old man put into such ungovernable fits of passion as sometimes occurred.

Another of his eccentricities was bathing his lower limbs every day in hot water, and having his nails pared. His servant was a careful man, and loved his master, but was often put to his wit's end about the nail-paring, as it was very seldom he had anything to cut. Sometimes the doctor would come to his relief, by starting a doubt about the success of the Chinese emperor, which took away the old man's attention from his toe-nails, to the greater comfort of his servant. As I was not able for much deck duty, I was taken into the cabin to assist the steward, and had every chance of observing his manoeuvres. During a gale of wind it is necessary for cleets to be nailed on to the cabin floor for the purpose of lashing the feet of the tables and chairs to keep them in their places. It is necessary also to fasten narrow boards round the edge of the table, called leeboards, to prevent things tumbling off; and during meals, it is necessary, when one feels the ship about to make a heavy lurch, to whip up a tureen of soup, or any other dish about to spill, and place it down when she recovers. Much amusement was excited on these occasions, at Mr Jackson's expense, by his attempts to keep things right. Sometimes a little wag of a French boy, when the ship gave a lurch, would drop as if he were shot, and come tumbling passed the lawyer, looking very much as if about to have his brains knocked out against the lee bunker – it was the work of a moment for the old gentleman to drop on his knees, with a firm

hold of his chair with one hand, while he grabbed at little Alexe with the other, as he tumbled to leeward, but the little wag was generally too nimble for him.

The sea close on the west coast of Ireland looks so pure and so free from any foreign matter, that one can scarcely think it possible for it to be more so anywhere else. This is far from being the case, however, for, when approaching the land, say about the distance where soundings with the deep-sea lead are begun to be taken, a very perceptible brownish shade begins to be visible in the colour of the water, which increases as the land is neared.

Every journey, by land or sea, has its end; so, after an absence of nearly two years, we made the land on the south-west of Ireland, without the loss of a single ship, except the burned frigate. The Greenock, Liverpool, and Bristol ships having got orders from the Commodore to make the best of their way home, we stood away with the London ships for the Land's End of old England, with the Cumberland at our head. The second evening after parting with the western portion of the fleet, when off the Scilly Islands, we encountered a very heavy gale; and as the Commodore's light was lost sight of, we hove to till daylight, by which time the gale had taken off, when we found only two ships in sight; the Commodore, with all the others, had run on through the night. There was nothing for it but to make the best of our way for the Downs, and run chance of steering clear of Frenchmen. This we managed to do, and in due time reached the mouth of the Thames.

I mentioned that between decks was stowed with logwood billets. During the passage home, those of the crew who were liable to be pressed had, at odd times, formed a cavity behind these billets large enough to hold them all. Here they ensconced themselves, closing the entrance after them. Part of the Channel Fleet lay anchored at the Nore, which we had to pass, from

which a press-gang boarded every ship in our company, and played the old Port Royal game over again. Such was the necessity for seamen in the navy at that time, that even a second mate's berth in a homeward-bound ship was no protection. I also mentioned that our second mate was generally disliked by all of us, and I myself had narrowly escaped death from his hands, so that no sorrow was felt when he was nabb'd. He had hidden himself in the store room under the cabin floor, which is entered by a small scuttle in the floor; and under the store room is the powder magazine – both places are quite dark. When the lieutenant boarded us, seeing so few men, he ordered the hands to be turned up, none being in sight but the French man and myself; being told they were all before him, he ordered his men to search the ship. The pressible men were in their hole and invisible; the store room and magazine were searched, but no one found, when the officer ordered me to get a lantern and candle, which I did, and very soon my old friend the second mate was in the hands of the Philistines. If he had had the eye of a basilisk, I would not now be recording the case, as the scowl he fixed on me was truly diabolical, accompanied with, apparently, a very sincere prayer that I might be consigned to a very undesirable place. I certainly knew he was hidden, but did not know where, and had I not given the light some one else would have done it, so I was not the sole cause of his capture. But I honestly confess I felt no sympathy for him, nor have I any compunctuous visitings of conscience on his account, or for my share in the transaction. Owing to many lefthanded obligations I lay under to the gentleman, I confess I saw him dragged into service of his uncle George the Third without shedding a tear.

The bad habit of swearing, which is so common in merchant ships by the officers, and which they consider necessary in enforcing their orders, is very vulgar and reprehensible, to say the least of it; but it is almost a rule that officers most

deeply guilty of the practise are, upon the whole, the most merciful and humane. I don't pretend to account for this, but there is practical proof of it; perhaps the bad feeling may partly blow away in the blasphemy. My old friend – I beg pardon; this is the last time I shall speak of him – did not make much noise in a general way; he was a man of action, and “bided his time,” swore deeply, but not frequently. However, I am not sure if this cautiousness proceeded from a sense of its wickedness, as I well believe that to have burned him for his religion would have been doing a work of supererogation, consequently would have been a loss of both labour and fuel.

As soon as we got clear of uncle George's men, we began to work up the Thames towards London, a distance of 70 miles. The distance, however, is not the worst of it; the innumerable host of craft of every size and rig working up and down such a narrow space every tide, rendered it a very difficult task to steer our way with any expedition. One species of craft was particularly annoying – the colliers from Sunderland and Newcastle. They were in vast numbers, great black beasts of burden, as unshapely as a haystack, and hard as adamant; not a bit of gingerbread by the way of ornament about them; which is the pride of a sailor's heart in other ships. The consequence was that the motley crew rather enjoyed a bit of a rub at a dandyfied ship, now and then; and if they managed to carry away a figurehead flying-jibboom, spritsailyard, or rub off a quarter gallery, or even a bit of paint, it did their heart good. They had sense enough to give a king's ship a wide berth; were they to get foul of them, as many tomahawks would be set to work as in a few minutes would not leave them a whole rope. Our fellows who successfully dogged Uncle George, came joyfully out of their hiding place, and we made our way up to Blackwall all right. After dark the pressible men landed; and in due time the Frenchmen were paid and sent to prison, well satisfied with their good luck.

The beauty of the scenery on the banks of the Thames, and the bustle on its surface are sufficient to raise wonder and admiration in any beholder. It is not surprising that the young African seemed perfectly bewildered. The everlasting recurrence of some novelty, a town, a splendid villa, the absence of trees everywhere except where they ought to be, with the bustle on the river, altogether upset all his small stock of philosophy. I watched him closely, but did not interrupt his meditations; and when I did ask what he thought of the state of things, he shut his eyes, shook his head gravely, and replied, very slowly, "White man be dibble." But alas for poor Mr Jackson's disappointment! the amount of it cannot be told; his long-cherished belief had turned out a phantom – not a junk nor a celestial to be seen anywhere. His fit of despondency, however, did not last long; he rallied soon, under the forlorn hope of their speedy arrival; it was only a matter of days. The brother of the sun and moon was not far off, a fact which doomed England would soon find to her cost. His friends had decoyed him away, on the pretence of going on a pleasure trip; but alas for the poor maniac! He was soon to be too well assured of the reality of a fate he had little dreamed of – incarceration for life in a mad-house in Moorfields. It was surely very cruel of his relations to treat him so. He was of a cheerful temperament, quite conversable on common subjects, good natured, perfectly harmless, and, when let alone to indulge his innocent foibles, quite happy. When contradicted, or annoyed about his hobbies – the conquest of Britain or the pairing of his nails – he got dreadfully excited, certainly. But there was no necessity for his relatives to go to this extremity, his moon-struck ravings were quite inoffensive; and when illustrating his views he seemed the most happy being alive, needing only to be kept in plenty of writing materials and a patient listener. To be sure the cupidity of his relatives was to be taken into account in summing up the why and wherefore of the

vile transaction. There was a valuable property going a begging if the present owner was only disposed of, and his harmless lunacy gave them a plausible pretence for that purpose. They had borrowed his principal hobby, the Chinese chimera, to ride him across the Atlantic on, and appointed an agent in London to dispose of him on his arrival. Nothing more was needed than a plausible pretence to get him to Moorfields. When all was ready, a trap was set to decoy him into it. The mate proposed a pleasure trip to St. James' Park, which was cheerfully agreed to, and the poor victim stepped overside as happy a man as any in London. But "what a falling off was there" when the carriage drew up at a gloomy mansion, with iron stanchions in the windows. He saw the whole plot at a glance, was struck dumb for a moment, then fell into an ungovernable rage, and if he had possessed the requisite strength and freedom, would have torn Murdoch into "shreds and patches."

The good ship Crescent having been taken into dock, I, too, had to take leave of her, where for nearly two years I had domiciled, and during that time enjoyed many, comparatively, happy hours, with many long and weary days of sickness and privation. When I went on board of the Crescent, I was as stout a boy of fourteen and as active on my limbs as any of my age in London. What am I now? A poor sallow skeleton, needing a staff to enable me to crawl along the street; my hopes of following the profession of my choice blasted in the bud, and my future prospects dark indeed. To go home and become a burden on my dear old parents, with all those joyous hopes, of which I was so full when I parted from them, gone forever, is a state of matters requiring more philosophy than I am master of to bear with equanimity. Sometimes, indeed, I look at my case in a different light. My misfortune was not brought on by any wilful fault of my own. My health is improving. I have a home where the warm heart of a loving mother is bleeding for my condition,

and whose arms will be opened wide to receive me. The profession I had chosen is by no means the paradise I once conceived it was. I might not have succeeded in raising myself up to the position in it to which I aspired. I may yet be able to maintain myself honestly in a different line of life, so that, taking all things into account, I ought not to despond; and I will try to convince myself that this is the proper light in which to view my present position.

Till once my uncle has his business arranged for returning to Liverpool, I am boarded in the celebrated old hotel – The Swan with Two Necks – in Ladlane, one of the largest coaching establishments in the world. Mail coaches go from it to every quarter of the kingdom; there is scarcely an hour by day or night in which a coach is not going out of or coming into that large gateway. It is truly a wonderful place. Besides apartments for every necessary purpose on a large scale, there are one hundred bedrooms for lodgers. I know this by observing the numbers on a board in the bar, where the bedroom keys are hung; besides each key the number of the room is marked; so when I wish to go to bed I ask for No. 72, the number on my bedroom door, when a servant walks before me with a lighted candle, unlocks the door, and hands me the key and candle. I lock myself in, and no one can annoy me.

I am much amused, sometimes, by listening in the taproom to the slang of the stable, and to see how distinctly the lines of caste among the parties are kept up, from the stable boy to the guard of the mail-coach, who is looked up to by the whole tribe with much awe and respect. He is the whale among the minnows, his martial stride sufficient to cause the beholder to regret that he was not placed at the head of a regiment, rather than at the stern of a coach. A martial figure he surely is – full-skirted scarlet coat, with gold lace facings; gold hatband; waistcoat and inexpressibles to match; horse pistols in his belt; a brass bugle

dangling from his neck – all show him to be no common man. And if he shows the same defiant bearing in crossing Houndslow heath as he does in the taproom of the Swan, one would imagine the boldest highwayman in England would not have the temerity to approach him in the way of his profession.

As these good people and I have nothing in common, we have no intercourse; but there is a little old man, a musician, who calls often, in whom I take a great interest. You will be surprised when I tell you the instruments he uses, and by which he brings out wonderful harmony: they are small clear-toned bells, and his manner of handling them is very amusing. The bells are nine in number, toned so as to suit the common musical scale. He fixes one on each great toe, one in each knee, one on each elbow, one in each hand, and one on the crown of his head; and the dexterity displayed in their management generally, and the precision with which every bell chimes into its proper place in the tune, – shewing the ingenuity, industry, and patience which the poor man has exhibited in bringing the thing to the perfection arrived at, – are truly surprising. As might be expected, the bells are not suitable for the minor or plaintive keys, where solemn or plaintive sounds are necessary, consequently his tunes are all of the major or sharp class, which the quick, sharp tip of the bell is best adapted for. But the most amusing part of the performance is the grotesque, jerking motion of the man, which is beyond all description. He sits on a chair, his legs stretched out, his feet resting on his heels, with a face as grave as if he were the judge of the Old Bailey, hitching like one under the influence of St. Vitus' dance. But it requires great art and care to bring only one tone out of each bell, and prevent the tinkling sound, which would spoil it all.

I understand, as my uncle is not going to take another ship out of London, I am soon to start for Liverpool, whence you may expect to hear from me. – Yours truly, S.R.

LETTER X

Liverpool 1804

As soon as the Captain had settled his affairs in London I was shipped and consigned to the firm of Tremlow & M'Dowal, ship owners, Liverpool, in the same clumsy machine by which I left that town two years ago. I was an inside passenger this time, – my passage being paid and two gold seven shilling pieces given to me as pocket money. It was dark by the time we reached Barnet, and as the driver was changed at that place, that functionary looked in, in a state of much concern to know if I felt comfortable. I was not so green as to believe that my comfort was his principle object, as I well knew that a piece of silver lay much nearer his heart. Not having any silver, I foolishly gave him one of my gold pieces – green enough this time – to change and return me six shillings; he returned me six shillings with a polite bow and a pleasant smile on his rosy face, and we parted forever.

We reached Coventry in the forenoon, where we stopped for breakfast. I had a small basin of tea and a buttered hot roll, for which I paid the very moderate sum of one and sixpence. I handed two shillings for the purpose of payment, when, to my great mortification, I was told, in not very complimentary terms, that one of them was a counterfeit. The rascal of a coachman had jewed me in the dark. I drew myself up with the air of a Nabob, told them where I got it, and with all my force threw it into the fire. I saw at once that this removed all suspicion from me; but it was amusing to see the rush made by several of the grooms, at the fire, to get hold of the coin, no doubt with the intention of rubbing it up for the purpose of imposing on some body. Such is human nature. The very scoundrels who had been eyeing me

so contemptuously a moment ago for tendering a coin which I believed to be sterling, struggling in the very fire to get hold of it to impose on some one, well knowing it to be counterfeit.

Nothing further worthy of notice occurred till, after another dreary journey of two days and two nights, we arrived in Liverpool. I was kindly received by my aunt and all friends. I was overhauled by an eminent doctor, whose opinion was, that cutting off the foot and substituting a cork one would be the most prudent thing; if not, to go into the infirmary for a time, and give up all thoughts of the sea, as, were I to go to sea again, scurvy would intervene, and finish my career. Having communicated these sad news to my dear old parents, an answer was sent that no cutting off was to take place. that I might try the infirmary for a little, till my mother would come to take me home. I went into the place for a few weeks, but soon saw that no good could result from remaining, and came out neither better nor worse from the experiment. I am informed that my mother has had a very providential escape in her attempt to reach me. She had been on her way from Wigton in a small sloop, which was compelled to put back, and having gone ashore for the night, the sloop sailed without her before morning, and has never since been heard of. It is a curious coincidence that the old Jean of Wigton, Captain Eglin, who brought me here four years ago, is here now, so that you and my friends and school-fellows may expect to see me when she reaches your side of the herring pond. One thing you will be sorry to see – I am not so active on my limbs as when we parted; but my heart is as warm to you and all my friends as ever.

By the imperfect sketch of my wanderings which I have given you since we parted, you will see I have kept my eyes open. Whether I may have viewed everything without prejudice or not, I am not a proper judge; but I have done my best to do so. I have seen a great deal of life and manners both in civilized and

savage society, which, if I turn to good account, may be useful to me in my future intercourse with the world, if it be God's will that I shall, in course of time, become a serviceable and active member of society. I have also had reason to change my views of many things since I saw you, which I hope to explain when we meet; but there are two things I have learned in your company, which my experience has in every instance most decidedly confirmed – that “Honesty is the best policy,” and that the knowledge of and belief in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the highest and truest wisdom for Time and Eternity.

Yours, &c., S.R.



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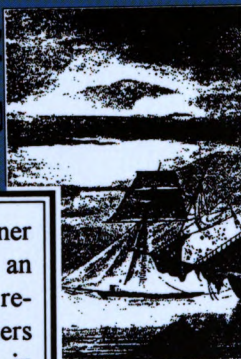
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